**PARTY REFORM AND POLITICAL REALIGNMENT:
THE NEW POLITICS MOVEMENT IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

ADAM HILTON

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

October 2016

ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers an analysis of the New Politics movement to reform and realign the Democratic Party in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The central problem is to develop an understanding of the origins, nature, and limits of the reform movement. This study also addresses questions regarding the interactive relationships between political parties and social movements, the capacity of social movement actors to transform party institutions to better influence American public policy, and the role of contingency and agency in moments of political crisis.

Whereas many scholars have interpreted the New Politics movement as a conflict between "amateurs" and "professionals" or "blue collar" workers and "white collar" reformers, I offer an explanation that roots the New Politics reform project in the longer historical struggle over Democratic Party structure and programmatic identity going back to the early New Deal period. By placing the New Politics movement in its proper historical and institutional context, this dissertation draws on extensive archival research as well as participant interviews to reassess this episode of reform, not as an effort to "dismantle the party" but to renew it by transforming it into a party of a different type.

This study finds that the New Politics movement, while scoring many important victories, such as including more women, young people, and people of color in the party hierarchy, failed in its ultimate ambition to build a national programmatic party due to the staunch opposition of state party leaders, cold war intellectuals, and especially the leadership of the trade union federation. This was due primarily to the labor movement's own institutional position in the party, which channeled its influence through the smoke-

filled back rooms of elite brokerage – an arrangement which democratizing the party threatened.

Rethinking the New Politics movement challenges the predominant narrative that treats the post-1980 reorientation of the Democratic Party toward the political center as the inevitable and "common sense" response to the "excesses" of the late 1960s. As I try to show, rather than the inexorable result of liberalism's failures, the making of the modern Democratic Party was the result of a struggle between contending political projects. While the New Politics did not succeed in winning that war, it did decisively shape the contours of Democratic Party politics today.

For Ashlee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the product of years of intensive work, I feel there is no better way than to begin this dissertation with a note of thanks to all those on whom I have often relied for love, encouragement, and support during the research and writing of this study. First and foremost, I want to thank my excellent committee. Leo Panitch, my supervisor, mentor, and friend, trained me to cross-examine the thinking of giants, taking no assumption or conclusion for granted. Over the course of my graduate studies this often involved loosening my grip on tightly held beliefs, some of which were drawn more from the world of wishful thinking than from reality. He has taught me the invaluable lesson that solidarity involves asking the hard questions, not turning a blind eye to shortcomings of those with whom you sympathize. Stephen Hellman has been a constant source of support for me, from his course on Comparative Politics to our frequently wide-ranging discussions over coffee. His consistent encouragement to roll up my sleeves and "get my hands in the pasta" motivated me to dig ever deeper, seek out more sources, and let the research lead me to unexpected conclusions. Dennis Pilon brought onboard both a contagious concern for historical-institutional methodology as well as an enthusiasm for the study of the complexity of democratization, which brought out similar themes in my own thinking. Guys, I could not have done it with you.

Also, there are probably few other universities where I could have produced such a dissertation. York University's graduate program in political science has provided me with the resources and intellectual stimuli to undertake a project of this scope. My sincere thanks to all the department faculty and staff who have made York political science a welcoming and productive environment for a student to pursue a PhD. My special thanks

Research for corresponding with me at the very first stage of the project and generously sharing some of his unpublished manuscript with me.

The enjoyment I have had digging through the archives of manuscript libraries around the United States has been made possible by the patience and expertise of their staffs. While there have been too many to name here, I am indebted to them all. Special thanks, however, are due to the Democratic National Committee, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations Committee on Political Education, as well as the National Women's Political Caucus for granting me permission to access their records and unprocessed materials. Some of that research was made possible by a generous dissertation grant from the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library at Harvard University, as well as various funds made available by York University's Faculty of Graduate Studies and Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3903.

I owe so much to my family. Sadly, my stepmother, a constant source of loving support in my educational pursuits, is not able to see those pursuits come to fruition. However, this dissertation bears the mark of the positive influence she left behind. The members of both my immediate and wider family have been there for me throughout, providing encouragement and temporary respite from the project when necessary. I am lucky to have such a large family tree. I hope they excuse me for not namely them all individually.

I owe the most to my partner Ashlee Wactor. Ashlee has been on the frontlines of my graduate career, joining me to celebrate my triumphs and consoling me during the inevitable frustrations. She has borne the brunt of the burdens of having a graduate

student for a partner and I will spend the rest of my life repaying her. As a first act of

gratitude, I dedicate this dissertation to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAA   Agriculture Adjustment Administration
ADA   American for Democratic Action
AFL   American Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO   American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
AFSCME   American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
APD   American Political Development
APSA   American Political Science Association
ASDC   Association for State Democratic Chairs
CBTU   Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
CEA   Council of Economic Advisors
CDM   Coalition for a Democratic Majority
CIO   Congress of Industrial Organizations
CIO-PAC   Congress of Industrial Organizations Political Action Committee
CLC   Colorado Labor Council
CLUW   Coalition of Labor Union Women
COFO   Council of Federated Organizations
COPE   Committee on Political Education
CORE   Congress on Racial Equality
CRC   Compliance Review Commission
CWA   Communication Workers of America
DAC   Democratic Advisory Council
DACEO   Democratic Advisory Council of Elected Officials
DLC   Democratic Leadership Council
DNC   Democratic National Committee
DPC   Democratic Policy Council
DSA   Democratic Socialists of America
DSOC   Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee
EPIC   End Poverty in California
FEAC   Full Employment Action Council
FSM   Free Speech Movement
GOP   Grand Old Party
IAM   International Association of Machinists
ICEP   Initiative Committee for Economic Planning
ILGWU   International Ladies Garment Workers Union
MFDP   Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
NAACP   National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NDC   New Democratic Coalition
NOW   National Organization for Women
NRA   National Recovery Administration
NWPC   National Women's Political Caucus
PDP   Progressive Democratic Party
SANE   National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy
SCLC   Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SDS   Students for a Democratic Society

SERC   Special Equal Rights Committee
SNCC   Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UAW   United Auto Workers
YPSL   Young People's Socialist League

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In what will the history of a party consist? Will it be a simple narrative of the internal life of a political organization? ... The history of any given party can only emerge from the complex portrayal of the totality of society and state.
          -- Antonio Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks*)[1]

This dissertation is about the New Politics movement to reform the Democratic Party in the late 1960s and 1970s. That movement took shape amidst the internal party crisis of 1968 concerning the Vietnam War, however its roots stretched back to the long civil rights struggle within American society. For a generation, advocates of racial justice inside the Democratic Party had seen the latter's decentralized, federal structure as one of the foremost obstacles to extending the New Deal's nascent "rights revolution" beyond its primary beneficiaries: white male breadwinners. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the New Deal regime broke down due to its own contradictory dynamics, the New Politics movement took shape as an effort to realign the party to the left by reforming its internal structure and operations.

In its ultimate aims, the New Politics movement did not succeed. While it scored many impressive achievements between 1969 and 1972, its reform agenda eventually generated considerable opposition and organized resistance from stakeholders with vested interests in the "old politics" of party federalism: state party leaders, public officeholders, many labor leaders, and cold war intellectuals. By the mid-1970s, their resistance as well as the dissipation of pro-reform social movement activity outside the party effectively halted the New Politics movement inside the party.

---

[1] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 150-1.

The methodology employed in this dissertation breaks sharply from past scholarship on this episode of Democratic Party reform. Previous studies have almost invariably conceptualized the relevant intraparty cleavages in dichotomous terms: amateur versus regular; purist versus professional; ideological versus party oriented; white collar versus blue collar. However, as I will argue, frameworks premised on such polarized dichotomies are inadequate to capturing *what* people were actually fighting about and how the *dynamics* of political conflict informed actors' interpretations of what was possible and how they should respond strategically. No single continuum of political styles, attitudes or other static variables is capable of explaining the dynamics of conflict that attended such a fluid moment in American politics.

This study is rooted in the tradition of critical social science by trying to "bring the social back in" to better exemplify actors' self-understandings, motivations, and strategic constraints within a dynamic historical context.[2] Key to bringing the social back in is an analytical focus on the importance of institutions. Historical analysis of institutions has, of course, been a core concern for the multidisciplinary group of scholars working within the tradition of American Political Development (APD).[3] But the APD literature's tendency to emphasize path dependency over contingency has constrained its qualitative analyses of human agency during moments of acute institutional change.[4] By probing the limits and challenges of purposeful efforts to transform institutions, this

---

[2] Dennis Pilon, *Wrestling With Democracy: Voting Systems as Politics in the Twentieth-Century West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

[3] See Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds, *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[4] James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds, *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

dissertation attempts to unravel the complexities involved in historical processes of political change beyond the limits of the APD tradition.

An institutional approach is especially apt for the study of political parties. Most party scholars, of course, readily admit that parties are institutions. However, whether due to the convenience of measurement or one-sided theoretical premises, the study of parties has all too often substituted *voters* for study of the actual *party organization* itself. Whether conceptualized as the social voter, the partisan voter, or the issues voter, scholars have traditionally reduced the problem of party to the problem of voters, which, while generating important insights, tells us little about how parties operate or even why voting patterns change over time.[5]

Some studies that model themselves as critical responses to the voter-centered approach, such as the investment theory of parties, have done little to correct this tendency.[6] On the contrary, the investment approach has only inverted the traditional model, substituting the sovereignty of elite investors in the business community for the sovereignty of voters in the public sphere. The material basis of political behavior has always been an important part of American party politics, and especially as the capital intensity of year-round, mass-mediatized campaigning has increased the burden on aspirants for public office and recent Supreme Court decisions have reinforced the "common sense" view recognizing money as legitimate political voice protected by the

---

[5] For a review and critique of voter-centered approaches to political parties, see Cedric de Leon, *Party and Society: Reconstructing a Sociology of Democratic Party Politics* (London: Polity, 2014).

[6] Thomas Ferguson, *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). See also, Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

First Amendment.[7] However, while money and where it comes from are important factors to consider, political money is not the omnipotent force that many of its critics seem to imply. As the 2016 Republican primary campaign has shown, money power, when disorganized and uncoordinated, can fail, and fail dramatically, to pick the winner. Political money does not exist in a vacuum and its power must be understood within the institutional context of party organization, its nominating machinery, and the social forces they mold and channel.

Indeed, it was more than a century ago that Robert Michels redirected the flow of party-society relations altogether.[8] Instead of a party controlled by voters from below or business insiders from above, Michels argued that it was the party itself, its leadership and their staff, that dominated society. The party's "tendency to oligarchy" implied that even the most internally democratic political parties eventually succumbed to the bureaucratic logic of organization.[9]

So-called realists such as Joseph Schumpeter and Anthony Downs have also sought to disabuse democratic theorists of their illusions, arguing that parties are simply "teams of professional office-seekers" pursuing their own self-interest.[10] Far from a voter-centered perspective, the realists argued that politics is driven by the competition between party professionals themselves. But in their view this need not result in top-down Michelsian domination of party over citizens. On the contrary, the teams of party professionals are inextricably pulled by their competitive dynamic to the political center

---

[7] For a useful historical perspective, see Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), chapter 5.

[8] Robert Michaels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

[9] Michels, *Political Parties*, 70.

[10] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 [1942]); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957). See also, John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? A Second Look* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

where the most votes are to be found. Thus, while only democratic in the sense that voters are permitted to choose between at least two alternative teams, the parties' professional separation from society produces a stable system of two-party politics that ultimately serves the median voter.

However, both voter-centered and party-centered theories have tended to impose a radical separation of the party from civil society as well as the state. This has reinforced the tendency to diminish the causal significance of the formal organizational arrangements of the party as an institution. While David Mayhew is right to observe that in the United States parties have more often functioned as "arenas" than as "organizations," it is misleading to conceive of parties are mere venues in which active social forces battle it out in a pluralist contest for political influence on public policy.[11] Institutions are never neutral, and very often it is the specific institutional terrain over which social movements and political elites are fighting.

But even when the "bias" or "selectivity" of institutional arrangements is acknowledged, there is still a tendency to slip back into a passive view of political parties, as if they only reflected and reinforced the social cleavages that exist "out there" in society.[12] On the contrary, the central takeaway of the stalemated Marxist state debate of the 1970s, which insisted on the "relative autonomy of the state," should be interpreted as rescuing the *fundamentally creative role of politics* from the confines of class

---

[11] David R. Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Settings, and Government Activity in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 238.

[12] For a critique of political institutions as mere "echoes" of social cleavages, see James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 159; and Alan Ware, *The American Direct Primary: Party Institutionalization and Transformation in the North* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

5

instrumentalism or socioeconomic reductionism.[13] To take the relative autonomy of the political seriously, parties, as political institutions, must be conceptualized as creative actors in society, not only as gatekeepers for access to public office, but as influential agencies that selectively structure the social and help produce shared political identities in ways that are oriented to systemic reproduction rather than transformation.[14]

The so-called UCLA school's recent high profile interventions into the ongoing debates about parties in the United States has reconceived parties as "long coalitions" of "intense policy demanders" organized in civil society.[15] This has done much to reorient party scholars away from narrow examinations of politicians for whom social groups were secondary. This approach, however, risks displacing the role of party professionals and party institutions from the analysis altogether. As Eric Schickler has noted, the UCLA school's tendency to take for granted the internal coherence of parties ultimately disables analysis. It cannot explain why, for instance, two mutually incompatible groups of policy demanders were organized under the same umbrella of the New Deal

---

[13] On the state debate, see Paul Wetherly, Clyde W. Barrow, and Peter Burnham, eds, *Class, Power and the State in Capitalist Society: Essays on Ralph Miliband* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Clyde W. Barrow, *Toward a Critical Theory of States: The Poulantzas-Miliband Debate After Globalization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016). On "structural selectivity," see Bob Jessop, *Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place* (London: Polity, 1990). For one take on a post-state debate restatement of Marxist theory, see Michael Burawoy and Erik Olin Wright, "Sociological Marxism," in Jonathan H. Turner, ed., *Handbook of Sociological Theory* (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 459-86.

[14] This has been called the "political articulation" approach by Cedric de Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal, "Political Articulation: The Structured Creativity of Parties," in de Leon, Desai, and Tuğal, eds, *Building Blocs: How Parties Organize Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). But see also, Giovanni Sartori, "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology," *Government and Opposition* 4 (1969); and Adam Przeworski, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies," *Politics and Society* 7 (1977); and Leo Panitch, *Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State* (London: Verso, 1986).

[15] Kathleen Bawn et al., "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (2012); Marty Cohen et al., *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). See also, Christopher A. Baylor, "First to the Party: The Group Origins of the Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940-1960," *Studies in American Political Development* 27 (2013); David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Seth E. Masket, *No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislatures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

Democratic Party; or how the leadership of that party came to ally with one group over the other when such a decision would obviously jeopardize the party's majority status.[16] The UCLA school has inadvertently returned to a pluralist conception of party organization, where organizational structure is irrelevant and which passively reflects preexisting cleavages and group identities originating in society.

In contrast, this dissertation conceives of parties as relatively autonomous institutions simultaneously present in both the state and civil society, inherently bound up with the dynamic interrelations that define them. As such, political parties constitute something of a paradox: they are simultaneously bureaucratic organizations; collections of power-seeking politicians; representative agents; and collections of organized "policy demanders." As entities straddling the state and society, one should expect tension, conflict, contradiction, and dynamism to suffuse political parties as opposed to stasis or mere gravitation to the "median voter."[17]

Not only are parties subject to the pressure of social movements and organizations that provide essential resources for its electoral campaigns, but they are also riven by the structural pressures of state administration and the need to facilitate capitalist accumulation attendant on any governing coalition. Party platforms conceived while out of office can become an albatross around the neck of party government, when fiscal constraints and administrative incapacity can hamper implementation of party program and consequently strain the intraparty relations between leaders and led.

---

[16] Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 10.

[17] See Stephanie L. Mudge and Anthony S. Chen, "Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014).

In addition to facing pressures from outside, parties are also saddled with their own internal problems of organizational maintenance and competitive viability. As Daniel Galvin has recently demonstrated, this dimension of institutional design has significant explanatory power in tracing the differential histories of Republican and Democratic parties in the second half of the twentieth century.[18]

But to locate parties at the intersection of the state and society is not to simply reinvent the functionalist view of parties as "mediating institutions." While they certainly do referee access to public office, they do not only do that. Indeed, the intensity with which actors struggle to control parties is evidence of the significant role parties *potentially* play in shaping the wider field of politics. As uniquely positioned entities, parties can influence public policy and public discourse by using forms of co-optation, patronage, constitutional change, foreign threats, and electoral mobilization to reshape "common sense" understandings of social processes and set the very terms of legitimate political debate and contestation. As Alan Ware has put it, "it is not the voters, acting as an exogenous variable, whose changed behaviour transforms the party system; it is the actors in political parties, whose decisions about strategy (and their failure also to take such decisions) shape the likely responses from voters."[19] Parties – as organizational actors operating in both state and society – are also uniquely positioned to construct political orders or regimes, which sustain a discursive, intellectual, and policy framework within which political contestation is carried out.[20] And while parties usually fail at

---

[18] Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[19] Alan Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[20] David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Andrew J. Polsky, "Why Regimes? Ideas, Incentives, and Policies in American Politics Orders," *Polity* 29 (1997); Andrew J. Polsky, "The Political

consolidating such regimes and cannot simply conjure them up out of thin air, it is the goal toward which they often aim, and one in which they occasionally succeed.[21]

It is with this framework in mind that this dissertation reexamines the New Politics movement's attempt to reform and realign the Democratic Party. In doing so my account of this episode in the making of the modern Democratic Party departs from the prevailing wisdom concerning what the movement was about, how it fared, and what its legacy has been for American politics more generally. Contrary to the view of past scholars, who argue that the New Politics movement's anti-party agenda effectively disfranchised the working class from the Democratic coalition, I argue that the New Politics' attempt to democratize the Democratic Party ran into conflict with organized labor's own institutional structure, which had historically relied on forms of elite bargaining rather than participatory mobilization to exert influence in American politics. As opposed to being fundamentally anti-party in their orientation, many within the New Politics movement sought to transform the Democratic Party into a party of a different type, not one that was indifferent to the interests of the working class but rather one which could spread the benefits and protections of the New Deal regime more equitably throughout American society.

The New Politics failed to overcome the institutional pressures and organized interests that favored party federalism. Even so, my account of their struggle to reform and realign the Democratic Party contributes to the growing body of scholarship

---

Economy of Partisan Regimes: Lessons from Two Republican Eras," *Polity* 35 (2003); and Andrew J. Polsky, "Partisan Regimes in American Politics," *Polity* 44 (2012).
[21] de Leon, Desai, and Tuğal, "Political Articulation," 5.

challenging the standard narrative of the decline of American liberalism.[22] As Lily Geismer has recently argued, the tendency to read the Reagan revolution of 1980 back into the crisis of the late 1960s artificially smooths out what was in fact a turbulent and contingent process of transformation.[23] Indeed, it is to select one narrative account of many, which fingers the "excesses" of liberalism for its inexorable decline. Told in this way, the history of late postwar American politics reveals a teleology that inevitably eventuates in the decline and fall of liberalism and the triumph of conservatism. Such a narrative forecloses consideration of alternative pathways that might have been taken. The long 1970s was a period of intense flux, where many advocates of different competing political projects could and did point to evidence that suggested their alternative was the best option. One of these was the serious attempt to reform the Democratic Party by realigning its Cold War ideology along the lines of the protest movements of the 1960s. The New Politics movement was a punctuated window of opportunity in a longer process of transformation of the Democratic Party, one whose neoliberal outcome was not determined in advance.

However, my approach to political parties also reopens deeper and more immediate questions confronting progressive politics in the early twenty-first century. In dialogue with the vein of scholarship that seeks to orient political science research toward contemporary political problems, this dissertation aims to do more than simply "get

---

[22] See Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley, eds, *Making Sense of American Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Van Gosse and Richard Moser, eds, *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).
[23] Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

history right," as worthy a goal as that is.[24] The bipartisan neoliberal political order

constructed over the last three decades has presented advocates of egalitarian

redistribution with fewer opportunities to influence public policy. Precisely because both

Democrats and Republicans have converged on a broadly shared policy agenda of

increased capital mobility, diminished welfare state commitments, and privatization,

opponents of neoliberalism have found themselves without a significant organized voice

within the political mainstream. In this context, reconsidering the limits and possibilities

for reforming and realigning American party politics can contribute positively to a new

progressive agenda.

In addition to the secondary literature, this dissertation draws its sources from a

wealth of archival material, a handful of interviews with historical protagonists, as well

as contemporaneous media coverage (see the Bibliography for a full list). While I have

employed many methodological tools found in the comparative-historical tradition of

social science, this dissertation is not a comparison of two or more discrete attempts to

transform a political party. Though that research may yield important insights into the

possibilities and limits confronting projects of institutional change, it falls outside the

parameters of this study. As Dietrich Rueschemeyer, among many others, has reminded

us, single case studies are no less able to yield important theoretical gains than large-N

comparisons.[25] Moreover, my reexamination of the New Politics movement in the

---

[24] See Ian Shapiro, "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or; What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It," in Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, eds, *Problems and Method in the Study of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[25] Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?" in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Democratic Party challenges the method and conclusions of most existing scholarly

monographs, as the following chapter sets out.

CHAPTER 1

THE NEW POLITICS AND ITS CRITICS

By the late 1980s the US Democratic Party appeared to be mired in an unending existential crisis. Initially, many considered the party crisis that began with the explosive national convention in 1968 to have been effectively resolved by the landslide defeat of presidential nominee Senator George McGovern and the "New Politics" movement at the polls in 1972. The subsequent election of a southern Democrat, Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, to the White House in 1976 seemed to confirm the party had moderated its tone and been rewarded with a return to power. However, confidence in a restored Democratic majority soon evaporated as 1980, 1984, and 1988 delivered dramatic, lopsided defeats for Carter, former vice president Walter Mondale, and Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, respectively. Party centrists grouped together in the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) diagnosed the root of the problem to be the stubborn persistence of the New Politics movement within the party. Like an unending hangover, the Democratic Party's short-lived capture by New Politics insurgents in the late 1960s continued to linger and, as it was relayed by the party center, poison its image in the minds of American voters. By reforming the party's presidential nominating system as well as its governing structure, the New Politics had allegedly institutionalized a "new elite" of "special interest groups" that owed their formative experiences to the popular activism of the late 1960s and 1970s. It was their influence that constrained moderate party leaders from building an appealing liberal political consensus like that which had sustained Democratic majorities under Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and

Lyndon Johnson. As a result, the public perception of the Democrats had shifted from associating the party with the interests of the poor, African Americans, unions, Catholics, and the middle class to black militants, feminists, welfare recipients, as well as gays and lesbians. The centrists' proposed solution to the problem was nothing less than to "save" the Democratic Party from its "headlong dash into social democracy."[1]

The success of the DLC in installing its New Democrat vision in the party is well known. What is less frequently recognized, however, is that the DLC was not the first organized internal party faction to go to war against the New Politics. In fact, the New Democrat indictment of the New Politics echoed substantially similar objections raised more than a decade earlier in a predecessor organization, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM). While mostly composed of Democratic intellectuals, party operatives, and labor leaders rather than officeholders, the CDM had been active in fighting the reforms as they took hold inside the party in the 1970s, warning that the New Politics was leading the party away from mainstream American voters who were "unyoung, unpoor, and unblack."[2] Their efforts were supported by a burgeoning academic literature, mostly written by CDM members or their students, that identified the New Politics as the source of the Democrats' continuing post-1968 disarray. Taking up where the CDM left off, the

[1] On the Democratic Leadership Council see Al From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Kenneth S. Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism From Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000); Jon F. Hale, "The Making of the New Democrats," *Political Science Quarterly* 110 (1995); Stephen Medvic, "Old Democrats in New Clothing? An Ideological Analysis of a Democratic Party Faction," *Party Politics* 13 (2007); and Curtis Atkins, "Forging a New Democratic Party: The Politics of the Third Way from Clinton to Obama" (PhD diss., York University, 2015), where American National Election Studies survey data can be found on page 5, fn. 7. The "headlong dash into social democracy" is a phrase of Al From's in his *The New Democrats*, 173.
[2] Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), chapter 4.

DLC appropriated the anti-New Politics narrative constructed by centrist partisans and put it to use in their realignment of the Democratic Party.[3]

The CDM-inspired narrative of the New Politics movement has played a central role in the retreat of the Democratic Party from the left-liberalism of the late New Deal/Great Society era. Center-right political actors have used the specter of the New Politics as a weapon in their factional struggle to reshape the identity of the Democratic Party and the course of American public policy. Shifting the party away from the left, it was argued, was a "common sense" response in the face of Democratic defeat and Republican victory, which appeared to have captured the hearts and minds of formerly Democratic voters of the white middle class.

This dissertation seeks to reassess the New Politics movement and its attempt to democratize the Democratic Party in the decade following 1968. In its first phase, from 1969 to 1972, the New Politics engineered major alterations to the rules governing the party's convention delegate selection procedures and the process of presidential nomination. Significant institutional barriers to popular participation in the choice of presidential nominee were dismantled, opening the party up to greater social movement influence at the expense of the power of party leaders and officeholders who had previously monopolized the process. In its second phase, from 1973 to 1978, further attempts were made to democratize the party, focused on strengthening the party's

---

[3] While the CDM, like the neoconservative movement generally, had been born out of a concern for domestic politics, its increasing focus on foreign policy led it to support Reagan's New Cold War policy of confrontation with the Soviet Union, and ultimately into the Republican Party, compromising its goal of recapturing the Democrats from the New Politics. CDM members who stuck with the Democrats discussed merging with the DLC in the late 1980s, but the latter preferred not to inherit the legacy of an earlier ideological conflict or the CDM's close relationship to many in the trade union leadership. See Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010), 209, 214-7; and Andrew Hartman, *The War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

policymaking capacities and its disciplinary mechanisms to hold Democratic officeholders accountable as agents of the party rank and file.

Hailing from civil rights, student, antiwar, and feminist movements, New Politics activists viewed institutional reform as a means of achieving substantive changes in public policy. While prefigured by parts of the civil rights movement, and subsequently precipitated by the internal party clash over the Vietnam War, the new entrants attempted to realign the Democratic Party around a radical social-democratic vision of guaranteed basic income, full employment, détente with the Soviet Union, and an Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution. The New Politics reform agenda entailed nothing less than the attempted transformation of the Democratic Party into a party of a different type.

However, the New Politics' project to democratize the Democratic Party ultimately failed on these terms. Despite having achieved lasting changes to the presidential nomination system, its more ambitious structural reforms as well as its radical policy agenda met with pitched resistance at the hands of party and public officials, the majority of the labor union leadership, as well as the disaffection of many Democratic voters. In the face of the resistance offered by the anti-reform coalition, as well as the dissipation of the 1960s insurgent movements, democratization of the party was stalled and rolled back. The resulting product was a party composed of the various movements and tendencies that composed the New Politics, albeit one that integrated them on the basis of elite brokerage and popular demobilization. By failing to provide a new means for mass participation in party democracy, the New Politics pried open the party doors but found few waiting to enter.

As both the climax of postwar left-liberalism and the whipping boy of the DLC's Third Way ideology, the New Politics movement figures as a pivotal episode in the making of modern American politics. It is the purpose of this dissertation to demonstrate that the New Politics has been widely mischaracterized and misunderstood. Accordingly, as the first step in my effort to reassess the New Politics, this chapter will set out what is at stake in the debate by examining, in turn, what the movement was about, what its critics have said about it, and how the critics' claims fail to withstand careful scrutiny. In this chapter I will argue that the critique of the New Politics has been produced in service to a distinct political project. The critics' mischaracterization of the reform movement nurtured the false impression of New Politics' alleged dominance within the Democratic Party, offering a pretext for the restoration of party leaders' authority and a rightward shift in public policy.

What Was the New Politics Movement?

The "New Politics" movement may not be a household name, but its impact continues to be felt on the American political landscape in the way the Republican and Democratic parties select their presidential nominees. But while its effects continue to draw the attention of political scientists, the reform movement itself has sustained little scholarly attention in its own right. This is due in part to the difficultly of specifying its scope and boundaries. The movement calling for a new politics in the 1960s and 1970s crisscrossed institutional boundaries and international borders, finding expression in a variety of new left insurgencies in political arenas ranging from the American Congress and the

Democratic Party to the British Labour Party and the German Greens and elsewhere.[4]

Scholars and commentators have coped with this bewildering extent of new politics activity in a number of ways. Some have narrowed the definition of the New Politics to what they consider to be its essential causal force, such as changing communications technology, while others have embraced its grand horizons, defining it as the generic mode of political action of the "new social movements."[5] In the face of such confusion, others have taken a step back to ponder whether the New Politics actually constitutes more of a "mood" than a "movement."[6]

Uniting the diversity of the New Politics was a critical focus on political institutions and their basis of operation and authority. While the legacy of the 1960s New Left may evoke images of large street confrontations in Berkeley, Paris or Chicago, a significant swath of participants understood the limitations of protest as a form of political action, and the mutually reinforcing dynamics of activist militancy and state

---

[4] On the New Politics in Congress see Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Thomas P. Murphy, *The New Politics Congress* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1974); and Sam Hoffman Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo: Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014), chapters 4 and 6. On the British experience, see Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour* (London: Verso, 2001). For the broader European experience, see Gerassimos Moschonas, *In the Name of Social Democracy: The Great Transformation, 1945 to the Present* (London: Verso, 2002); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1996).
[5] For an early treatment of the New Politics that emphasizes technological change, see James Perry, *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1968). For a more expansive characterization, see Claus Offe, "Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics: Social Movements Since the 1960s," in Charles Maier, ed., *Challenging Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
[6] See James Burkhart and Frank Kendrick, eds., *The New Politics: Mood or Movement?* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971). For other important contemporaneous accounts of the New Politics see Frederick Dutton, *Changing Sources of Power: American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971); Lanny Davis, *The Emerging Democratic Majority: Lessons and Legacies from the New Politics* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974); Michael Harrington, *Toward a Democratic Left: A Radical Program for a New Majority* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); and Stephen Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces for Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

repression promoted an entryist perspective as the 1960s wore on. This orientation toward entering the political process was itself premised on a widespread diagnosis that interpreted everything from policy failures in Vietnam to the generalized sense of alienation at university campuses and corporate workplaces as the result of unresponsive forms of social, economic, and political organization. The demand for more participatory mechanisms of popular control found expression in a variety of venues, from the *Port Huron Statement* and the Office of Economic Opportunity's doctrine of "maximum feasible participation" to the Black Power call for community control.

Challenging the operation of unresponsive institutions required expanding the reach of democratic rights into unconventional arenas. In some spaces, such as the internal operation of universities, this was a new frontier of contestation. In others, such as state regulatory bodies, this entailed repudiating the statist trajectory of New Deal reformism altogether. The nascent public interest movement, for instance, declaimed the "capture" of formally neutral government agencies by the business community they were supposed to regulate, and sought to substitute decentralized mechanisms of control instead.[7] In each and every case, insurgent activists and organizations made claims that sought to introduce meaningful citizen input into decisionmaking procedures formally or effectively monopolized by experts, specialists, or elites. The expanded scope of democratic participation blurred the traditional boundaries that separated the private and the political.[8]

Some have overemphasized the "new" in the New Politics, however, attributing to its advocates a postmodern set of values or even a return to pre-modern romanticism that

---

[7] On public interest liberalism, see David Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chapter 5.
[8] Offe, "Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," 63.

motivated their rejection of mainstream political discourse and structures of authority.[9]

But as Claus Offe has recognized, this overlooks the degree to which the new insurgents did not reject modern values but, in fact, "espouse[d] arrangements that would allow specifically modern values … to be realized more fully."[10] In the US case in particular, rather than treating the New Politics movement as an exogenous development in course of American postwar politics, it must be seen as emerging from the contradictions of the New Deal order. By simultaneously promulgating and limiting the universalist "rights revolution" born during the 1930s and 1940s, the contradictions of the New Deal regime paved the way for its own legitimacy crisis in the late 1960s.

The Critique of the New Politics

For my purposes, the focus of this dissertation will be the New Politics movement within the national extra-governmental Democratic Party in the United States. With several important exceptions, the scholarly consensus on the New Politics and its reform of the Democratic Party has been overwhelmingly shaped by neoconservative intellectuals.[11]

---

[9] On post-material values, see Ronald Inglehardt, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). For a potent critique of this perspective that underscores the material interests of suburban constituencies articulating allegedly "post-material" values, see Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[10] Offe, "Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," 81.

[11] The key text here, and by far the most influential study to date of the post-1968 delegate selection reforms, is Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983). See also Jeane Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1978); Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley, The University of California Press, 1975); James W. Ceaser, *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); and Andrew E. Busch, *Outsiders and Openness in the Presidential Nominating System* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997). For an important exception to the neoconservative consensus within the first generation of party reform literature, see William Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983).

Their views appeared in scholarly journals such as *The Public Interest*, newspaper periodicals, and popular organs such as *Commentary Magazine*, and reflect a remarkable degree of consensus. Some of the foremost academic authorities on the subject, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Austin Ranney (himself a former reformer), and Nelson Polsby, were members of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, the anti-reform organization that formed inside the party to neutralize the influence of the New Politics movement.[12] Following the lead of James Q. Wilson's influential study of the "amateur Democrat" in city politics during the 1950s, the critics have emphasized the distinctiveness of the New Politics activists' "purist" political style, their attitudes, and their values.[13] But because the New Politics movement succeeded where their "amateur" predecessors largely failed – namely, in actually reforming party institutions – the scholarly critiques have focused on the "perverse" consequences of party reform. Ultimately, their criticisms boil down to four nested claims:

1) *Party organization*: By opening up delegate selection procedures, the reforms necessarily diminished the role of the party organization in selecting its presidential nominee, weakening the regular party.

2) *Electoral performance*: By diminishing party control over the presidential nomination process, candidates who are unrepresentative of the average Democratic voter can capture the party nomination and cost the Democratic Party

---

The neoconservative bent of New Politics reform critics is pointed out by David Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal in the United States: 1968-1972," *Studies in American Political Development* 10 (1996); as well as by Robert T. Nakamura and Denis Sullivan, "Neoconservatism and Presidential Nomination Reforms," *Congress & the Presidency* 9 (1982). However, these authors do not point out that many of these same critics were active participants in the intraparty struggle.

[12] On the CDM and its participants, see Vaisse, *Neoconservatism*, chapter 3; and Chapter 7 below.

[13] James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). I will put to the side questions of values, style, and attitude in favor of more institutional concerns. For a critique of the critics' use of Wilson's variables, see Ronald D. Rapoport, Alan I. Abramowitz, and John McGlennon, *The Life of the Parties: Activists in Presidential Elections* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986).

victory in the general election (George McGovern being the prime example).

3) *Public policy influence*: The loss of presidential power diminished the influence of traditional Democratic constituencies on public policy, resulting in the decline of American liberalism and the breakup of the New Deal coalition.

4) *Reformers' class character*: The nature of the party reforms reflected the interests of the white-collar reformers who initiated them, bringing to power within the Democratic Party a new "elite" constituency at the expense of its traditional blue-collar base.

Party Organization

In terms of examining their organizational effects, the neoconservative critics consider the reforms to have been fundamentally "anti-party" in nature. From their perspective, the opening up of delegate selection procedures necessarily came at the cost of party organization itself. Byron Shafer's judgment is typical in this regard: "At bottom, the result of all these reforms was *the diminution, the constriction, at times the elimination, of the regular party in the politics of presidential selection*."[14] While a detailed account of party organization prior to the advent of the reforms will follow in Chapter 2, it is necessary to sketch out some of the basics in order to understand where these allegations of anti-partyism are coming from.

For over a century prior to the post-1968 reforms, the national Democratic Party was nothing more than a loose confederation of state parties that came together every four years to nominate a presidential ticket and organize the national campaign. State parties themselves were not much more than networks of city machines, state and local officeholders, representatives of outside interest groups, and wealthy contributors. At the beginning of each presidential cycle, state party officials would caucus with local

---

[14] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 525 (emphasis in original).

notables, party activists, and politicians to select the state's delegation to the national nominating convention, often as a reward for loyal party service. Primary elections had been introduced into the nominating system in some states after the turn of the twentieth century to lessen the alleged abuses of "bossism" in the party-controlled caucus-convention system, but primary voters' presidential preferences were not binding on delegations, nor were delegates usually required to declare their own candidate preferences on the ballot. Under certain conditions primaries could function as an indicator of a lesser-known candidate's potential in the general election, as when John F. Kennedy used several primary victories in 1960 to demonstrate his electability despite his Catholicism and relative youth. But primary results, while sometimes influential, were never determinative, providing only one more item of information for party leaders to consider when finalizing their negotiations at the national convention.

In this mixed system of primaries, caucuses, and conventions, aspirants for the party's presidential nomination had to build a coalition among *state party leaders* – not *voters* – such as state committee chairs, governors, or senators, who controlled the votes of their delegations at the national convention and collectively determined the nominee. In the event that no clear winner emerged on the first ballot at the convention, state party leaders and other party officials could negotiate among themselves in the "smoke-filled rooms" of the convention hall for a mutually preferred candidate, each bargaining with his delegation's votes in his pocket. In this pattern of elite brokerage, the eventual presidential nominee had to be acceptable to most of the state party leaders, and sitting presidents were always assured of renomination.[15]

---

[15] See Edward C. Banfield, "Party 'Reform' in Retrospect," in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *Political Parties in the Eighties* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), 21-2; as well as James W. Davis, *US*

From the critics' perspective, the New Politics reforms radically transformed this system and, consequently, the kinds of candidates it was likely to produce. Before the reforms each stage of the nominating process, from the local precinct meetings to the national convention, had been conducted under the supervision of party leaders. After the reforms, the authority and autonomy of party officials to control the process had been reduced in favor of rank-and-file party activists.[16] Caucus participants and primary voters, whether seasoned activists or newcomers, were permitted to form their own delegate slates without the consent or approval of local party officials, giving any self-declared Democrat the opportunity to serve as a national delegate. In addition, state and local party proceedings could no longer be conducted behind closed doors or in inaccessible locations, such as the private residence of a local committee chair. Most significantly, all those running for a delegate seat, including party leaders and public officials, had to declare their preference in the presidential race in advance, binding them to cast their initial ballot for that candidate and eliminating any room for brokerage at the start of the national convention. Winner-take-all devices in the allocation of convention delegates were discontinued in favor of proportional representation, no matter which candidate party leaders preferred. Lastly, party leaders and officeholders were stripped of their special privilege to attend the national convention as unpledged delegates, while stringent affirmative action provisions were instated for the representation of racial minorities, women, and people under thirty.

Presidential Primaries and the Caucus-Convention System: A Sourcebook (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997); and Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).

[16] Throughout this dissertation I will equate the party rank and file with party activists, whether they are "regular" Democratic Party operatives or insurgents. What makes them the rank-and-file is not their ideological orientation but the role they play in the course of party activity. Party voters are rarely party activists, and I will retain this important distinction throughout.

A consequence of the removal of party regulars from the presidential nominating process, critics tell us, has been the hollowing out of any significant role for the national party convention. What used to function as a deliberative body for state party leaders to engage in complex negotiations and select a viable nominee has become nothing more than "a body dominated by candidate enthusiasts and interest group delegates," who only "ratify a choice made prior to the convention." Because nearly all delegates were now pledged to support a particular candidate before arriving, the convention survived "primarily as spectacle."[17]

Electoral Performance

Critics also maintain that the marginalization of those "dedicated to maintaining the party as an ongoing organization" has diminished "the gate-keeping functions" of party leaders and officeholders, portending disastrous electoral consequences for the party's eventual nominee.[18] The "near exclusion" of state party leaders from the presidential nominating process and the resultant openness of the party has made it more likely that a "radically unacceptable" candidate could capture the party's presidential nomination by cultivating an enthusiastic but ultimately unrepresentative following among party activists and voters.[19] Whereas before the reforms, presidential aspirants had to build a coalition among party leaders throughout the country, after the reforms presidential hopefuls could accumulate delegates in state primaries and open party caucuses, venues that lent themselves to highly motivated, intensely ideological participants, circumventing the

---

[17] Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, 76-7.
[18] Nelson Polsby, "The News Media as an Alternative to Party in the Presidential Selection Process," in *Political Parties in the Eighties*, 55; Ceaser, *Presidential Selection*, 266.
[19] Banfield, "Party 'Reform' in Retrospect," 26-7.

party leadership altogether. According to the critics, in the absence of the intermediation between candidates and voters provided by party leaders, the presidential nomination system had lost a valuable moderating mechanism that tended toward more or less widely acceptable and highly electable candidates for national office. The landslide defeat of Senator George McGovern in 1972, the first presidential contest following party reform, was taken as evidence of the inability of the new institutional framework to filter out candidates who were out of sync with the mainstream of American politics.[20]

Public Policy Influence

Taking a further step back and considering the wider implications of reform for the contours of post-1960s Democratic politics, critics have argued that the reformed presidential nomination system, by producing unrepresentative and unpopular nominees, broke apart the Democrats' New Deal coalition of working class voters, African Americans, liberals, and southerners, diminishing its influence on public policy and resulting in the general decline of American liberalism. Prominent liberal commentators have adopted this view as well. In their influential account of "the disintegration of the liberal coalition," Thomas and Mary Edsall give the New Politics a special – indeed, "catalytic" – role in the "chain reaction" that drove white working class voters out of the Democratic Party between the 1960s and the 1980s. While the widespread association of the Democrats with countercultural permissiveness, racial integration, and the welfare state was see as the root cause of the defection, they claim it was the new party rules which "in fact functioned to reduce the role of white working and lower-middle-class voters" by marginalizing the party bosses with whom "ethnic, working-class leaders"

---

[20] See Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*.

exerted influence in the selection of the presidential nominee.[21] Thus, by diminishing the power of the party leaders, the New Politics necessarily disenfranchised the key class constituency of the New Deal coalition, giving rise to the Reagan Democrat phenomenon and a bleak future for the party of New Deal liberalism.

To sum up the critics' argument so far, rule changes in the operation of the Democratic Party's nominating machinery had enormous ripple effects throughout the party system and the trajectory of national politics. Because party organization plays an important role in structuring presidential elections and the content of national policy, by restructuring the delegate selection process in the name of openness and participation the New Politics undermined party leaders' ability to act as a moderating force in the process of presidential nomination and ultimately damaged liberal forces in the American political arena.

Reformers' Class Character

With consequences as dire as these it is not surprising that the critics of the New Politics have questioned the nature of the reform movement itself in an effort to come up with an explanation of its profound results. While some critics have emphasized the unintended consequences of political reform, especially that which naively seeks to base politics on principle, a consistent refrain heard throughout the anti-reform literature is that party reform was in essence the project of a "new class" elite.[22]

---

[21] Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), ix, 5-6, 14. See also, Thomas Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984); as well as Ronald Radosh, *Divided They Fell: The Demise of the Democratic Party, 1964-1996* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

[22] This is the main argument of Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*; as well as Kirkpatrick in *The New Presidential Elite* and *Dismantling the Parties*. The two authors make remarkably similar arguments about the "class" nature of the reform coalition and the class effects of the reforms, though the former does not cite the latter.

These critics argue that, by design, the New Politics reformers sought to remake the Democratic Party in their own image. Their members cohered around the postwar system of expanded higher education and new knowledge-based, white-collar professions. They articulated a new, "post-material" set of values that emphasized "quality of life" social issues, such as peace and environmentalism, over the economic "bread and butter" demands of the preceding generation.[23] By injecting ideology into American politics through the introduction of such "divisive 'issues'" such as Vietnam, "race," and welfare, the reformers destabilized the non-ideological basis of compromise undergirding the New Deal party system.[24] Their politics was a politics of "purism," inclined to prioritize moral righteousness over electoral success or organizational maintenance.[25] Consequently, after having been rebuffed in their antiwar insurgency in 1968, the "new amateurs" became fixated on party reform "as an end in itself."[26]

According to the critics, reforming the party in the name of participatory democracy was a project inscribed with a specific class bias, one that privileged the highly educated, professionally skilled "new class" over the working class constituencies of the New Deal coalition. Indeed, this was evident in the character of the new party institutions created by the reforms at multiple levels of organization. At the grassroots level, participatory primaries, caucuses, and conventions – forums requiring more than a

---

Shafer's argument provides the basis for the Edsalls' account of party reform in *Chain Reaction*. For another, though less committed endorsement of the "new class" hypothesis as an explanation of the New Politics movement, see Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 88. For an argument that places its emphasis on unintended consequences, see Edward C. Banfield, "In Defense of the American Party System," in *Political Parties in the Eighties*. For a potent critique of the new class hypothesis see Plotke, "Party Reform."

[23] See Scammon and Wattenberg, *The Real Majority*.

[24] Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*, 354. See also, Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*.

[25] Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky, *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics* (New York: Scribner, 1976).

[26] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 76.

modicum of political consciousness, education, self confidence, and free time –

necessarily "favored white-collar elements" within the party rank and file, drawing the

Democrats away from their traditional "blue-collar constituencies" as represented by the

leadership of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations

(AFL-CIO).[27] The New Politics reforms, Shafer alleges, "meant that the discretion of

those who had previously interpreted local party regulations, usually on the basis of

experience and custom, would necessarily be curtailed, while the influence of those who

specialized in mastering and then manipulating formal rules would simultaneously be

enhanced."[28] For Kirkpatrick, the declining need of presidential aspirants to rely on

formal party organization and its leaders further increased the demand for "symbol

specialists" with the requisite skills and expertise in communications and public relations,

inflating their prestige and influence in American politics.[29]

From the critics' perspective, therefore, the democratization of the Democratic

Party at the hands of the new, white-collar elite was an illegitimate political project

carried out by a minority faction within the majority party. The reforms they pursued

under the banner of openness and participation ultimately served to promote their own

interests in the party by restructuring the organization in ways more conducive to their

own political capacities. That their interests and values were unrepresentative of the

average Democratic voter was seen in the outcome of the 1972 presidential race. Indeed,

Martin Shefter has suggested that "the very demand for guaranteed representation

through racial or sexual quotas" in the delegate selection process was evidence that the

---

[27] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 530.
[28] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 197.
[29] Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*, 356.

New Politics movement was "unwilling or unprepared to do what was necessary to acquire additional support" and "win more votes than its rivals."[30]

Assessing the Critique

It is clear that the critics of the New Politics movement place a very heavy burden of responsibility on the reformers for the general decline of New Deal liberalism in the post-1960s era. The Democratic Party would only reclaim the White House once in the period between 1968 and 1992 – a victory whose slim margin was all the more surprising given the disgrace of the Republican leadership in the wake of President Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal. The single-term presidency of Jimmy Carter was itself only further testament to the crisis of governance which critics of party reform laid at the feet of the New Politics movement, seeing an inexperienced peanut farmer's ascension to the presidency of the United States as the predictable outcome of the party rule changes.[31] While no critics held that poor electoral performance and a crisis of the presidency were the intended outcomes of the democratization of the party as such, they alleged that the New Politics reformers had unwittingly created the conditions that facilitated such problems in the pursuit of their own class interests.

What are we to make of these arguments? Whether we look at the electoral dimension, the new class hypothesis, or the assertion that New Politics reforms were anti-party in nature, the major claims of the critics do not withstand careful scrutiny. Rather, the hostility to democratic reform contained in these arguments is more influenced by politics and ideology than it is by evidence and analysis. While we will see how the New

---

[30] Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, 92.
[31] Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform*, chapter 3.

Politics movement was limited in its success by its own internal contradictions, it is necessary to first clear away the mischaracterizations of its critics.

David Plotke is one of the few political scientists who challenges the claim that party reform was responsible for the electoral disarray of the Democratic Party in the late 1960s. Indeed, he shows that major electoral losses were recorded well before the advent of reform. Between 1964 and 1968, the Democrats lost ten seats in the Senate, fifty-two in the House, thirteen governorships, and suffered a 20 percent decline in partisan identification in the electorate. Rather than being caused by the entrance of the New Politics movement or the restructuring of the delegate selection process, the Democrats' electoral misfortunes are attributed by him to the growing contradictions within the New Deal coalition itself, namely the inability to continue to reconcile, on the one hand, more assertive race-conscious policies with southern and working-class conservatives, and on the other, cold warriors and liberal doves. The growth of antagonistic relations between and within coalitional blocs defied the ability of the party leadership to hold the New Deal coalition together any longer.[32]

Nor was this inability to manage an unstable Democratic coalition a matter of reformers having injected "issues" and "ideology" into a previously ideology-free arena of pragmatic politics. While sharp divergences at the level of culture and discourse did distinguish elements of the New Left from their parents' generation, these surface level differences mask the similarities the late 1960s shared with the sharp ideological and political conflicts that characterized the 1930s and 1940s. Following the consolidation of the New Deal order's "common sense" understanding of legitimate political discourse, it may have appeared to some during the 1950s and early 1960s that ideology had no place

---

[32] Plotke, "Party Reform."

in American politics.[33] But this proposition becomes unsustainable when intraparty conflicts between Taft and Eisenhower Republicanism, on the one hand, and Truman and Popular Frontism, on the other, are brought back into the picture. Those polarized conflicts were about the very basis of political contestation rather than negotiating over its terms. The destabilization of the New Deal coalition had reopened those debates before the end of the 1960s.[34]

Furthermore, the incapacity of party leaders to continue to broker the divergent interests within the New Deal coalition through the late 1960s casts doubt on the critics' assumption of robust party organization at the local and state levels prior to the advent of reform. As Daniel Galvin has recently demonstrated, postwar Democratic presidents invested precious few resources in building or even maintaining the infrastructure of the national party committee, state-level committees, or their organizational capacities. This was the result of what Galvin describes as "the tendency of Democratic presidents to view *policies* as the primary instruments for nurturing their party coalition," as well as the presumption that Democratic legislative majorities and deep levels of partisan identification in the electorate were permanent features of the postwar political order.[35] As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, the institutional structure of the Democratic Party possessed very little ability to negotiate a stable consensus between competing political interests when their relations became strained. The New Deal order was sustained through a series of conjunctures that provisionally tied together very

---

[33] See, for example, Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).
[34] This point is made in Plotke, "Party Reform," 233.
[35] Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 37-8. See also, Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

divergent interests around economic growth, Soviet containment, and gradual progress on civil rights. When the preferences of party leaders were tested in the 1960s, social movement insurgents were more often shut out of party affairs, rather than having their demands genuinely negotiated. Resort to these kinds of tactics indicates that the organizational capacities of party leaders to broker compromise among various interests have been exaggerated. It is perhaps not surprising then that very few accounts of party reform include any real institutional analysis of the party before it was reformed.[36]

If the electoral problems besetting the Democratic Party began prior to reform and in fact reflected the organizational atrophy of the party's institutional capacity to broker compromise, perhaps the reforms still bear the burden of privileging white collar elites at the expense of its working class constituencies, thus contributing to, if not causing, the unraveling of the New Deal coalition? The "new class" hypothesis, of course, has a certain plausible sociology and intellectual context to it.[37] Enrollment in America's higher education system grew rapidly over the postwar period from 2.3 to 4 million in the 1950s, and more than doubled again by the end of the 1960s. And while campus unrest was widespread throughout the second half of the latter decade, the prominence of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley (FSM), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of Michigan, and the building occupations at Columbia appeared to connect students at *elite institutions* with increasing political militancy, causing eminent sociologist and future CDM supporter Seymour Martin Lipset, among others, to rethink the typical cold war formula that associated radicalization with lower levels of

---

[36] Plotke, "Party Reform."
[37] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 55.

education.[38] Moreover, FSM and SDS leaders such as Mario Savio and Tom Hayden drew much of their critical analysis from the texts of sociologist C. Wright Mills, who judged the "labor metaphysic" at the center of Marxist thought to be "unrealistic," and indeed several New Politics theorists, such as Frederick Dutton and Michael Harrington, endorsed SDS's 1962 *Port Huron Statement*, which placed special emphasis on the agency of university students to effect social and political change.[39]

But for all the impact campus politics had on the nature and trajectory of "the Sixties," the extrapolations made and conclusions drawn about a new class by the critics of the New Politics are superficial. For instance, citing Byron Shafer's definitive study of party reform for support, the Edsalls claim that the New Politics reforms "produced a class shift in terms of the makeup of Democratic presidential convention delegates."[40] However, this claim is highly misleading. On the one hand, while the Edsalls probably have the 1972 convention in mind, Shafer's *Quiet Revolution* contains no analysis or account of the post-reform party conventions at all. But if the Edsalls cite Shafer in error, it is a mistake that is comprehensible. After all, it is indeed the major claim of Shafer's tome that the reforms elevated a "new class" elite within the party hierarchy. However, this conclusion is purely inferential, extrapolated from a detailed history of reform politics between 1968 and the eve of the 1972 convention, and is not verified with any empirical data, especially regarding the composition of convention delegations. In the end, Shafer relies on what he admits are "speculations" and "projections" based on the

---

[38] Christopher P. Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 180.

[39] C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *New Left Review* I/5 (1960); Dutton, *Changing Sources of Power;* Harrington, *Toward a Democratic Left*. See also, Loss, *Between Citizens and the State*, 167; and James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[40] Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 93.

institutional analysis that preceded them.[41] Such an analysis relies on reading "the character" of institutions in a way that fails to acknowledge ambiguity or alternative interpretations, which could lead to different speculations and projections regarding their implications. Take, for instance, Shafer's claim, quoted above, that the codification of rules for delegate selection privileged political actors "specialized in mastering and then manipulating formal rules," namely, white collar elite activists. But why the advent of formal rules in place of custom and tradition should necessarily privilege white collar elites is never explained, nor is it backed up with empirical evidence for confirmation. Moreover, it flies in the face of the history of political struggles of the powerless to extract clear and binding rules of conduct and obligation from social and political rulers. As will be shown in the chapters that follow, it was precisely because formal party rules were *not* codified or transparent before reform that white collar *party leaders* were able to exercise arbitrary authority in the face of social movement insurgencies.

But the Edsalls' assertion that the 1972 convention offers evidence of an elite "class shift" is also misleading for another reason. Jeane Kirkpatrick's enormous study of *The New Presidential Elite* does supply copious amounts of survey data and analysis of the composition and style of the 1972 Democratic convention delegates, claiming that it demonstrates the rise of a "new breed," a "new class," and a "new politics" in presidential nominations.[42] Oddly enough, however, she does not compare her data with past conventions – a striking omission in a study that claims to be analyzing an emergent force in American politics. Scholars who have conducted comparative research on the party conventions before and after reform have found that while delegates with a college

---

[41] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 603, n. 6.
[42] Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*.

education – the key characteristic of the "new class" – did increase from 43 to 52 percent of convention participants between 1968 and 1972, those with annual incomes of $10,000 *or less* increased from 13 to 27 percent.[43] In addition to the massive increase in participation rates of African Americans, women, and young people, Democratic National Committee chair Lawrence O'Brien's own records reveal that the 1972 convention also hosted a larger number of union members – more than 300 in total – than any previous Democratic convention, increasing their proportion of delegate seats from 4 to 16 percent.[44] If any kind of "class shift" was evident in the makeup of the Democratic Party's 1972 nominating convention, it was more in the direction of working class people than white collar elites. In fact, what the data suggest is that college educated, white collar party activists were already preponderate in the party's presidential nominating conventions well before the reforms, and not much more so after their introduction.

But if there was no elite, "new class" shift in the composition of convention delegations, perhaps the New Politics movement is responsible for severing the link between the working class and the Democratic Party at the level of rank-and-file voters? Ever since the blue collar defection in 1972 and the Reagan Democrat phenomenon of the 1980s, it has become an artifact of common knowledge that white working class voters have abandoned the Democratic Party en masse. As the victims of court-ordered racial

[43] According to the 1970 US Census, individuals with annual incomes below $10,000 represented 70 percent of the population; those holding college degrees, 11 percent. See John W. Soule and Wilma E. McGrath, "A Comparative Study of Presidential Nominating Conventions: The Democrats 1968 and 1972," *American Journal of Political Science* 19 (1975), 503, Table 1. See also, Arthur H. Miller et al., "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election," *American Political Science Review* 70 (1976). As Plotke observes, "Jeane Kirkpatrick's study of delegates to the 1972 Democratic convention was more careful in its presentation of data than in the conclusions drawn, and far more careful than many of the uses made of that study in neoconservative polemics." Plotke, "Party Reform," 229.

[44] Memo to Lawrence O'Brien from Dick Murphy re: Labor and the Democratic National Convention, 28 October 1972, Box 240, Folder: Labor 1972, Lawence O'Brien Papers, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA. See also Schlesinger, *The New Reformers*, 90; and Crotty, *Party Reform*, 132.

integration, increased taxation, and racial quotas, white workers are widely seen as having felt abandoned by the increasingly radical liberalism of Democrats such as George McGovern. Republicans then capitalized on this rift by playing up culturally conservative issues to lure the white working class away from voting for their own economic interests.[45]

First of all, it must be pointed out that the solidity of white working class support for the Democrats has often been exaggerated. After a very high degree of support in the wake of the New Deal and World War II, white workers' votes for Democratic presidential nominees flagged severely during the 1950s within both union and nonunion households across the North. While support revived by 1960 and hit its historic peak in 1964, it quickly returned to its 1950s levels thereafter.[46] But, more importantly, as Larry Bartels has shown, "while Democratic presidential candidates have lost significant support among white voters over the past half-century, those losses have been *entirely concentrated among relatively affluent white voters*."[47] In fact, the steepest decline in low-income white voter support for the Democrats occurred before the party reforms, between 1964 and 1968. Support from white voters with high incomes fell faster than did their low-income counterparts during the period of the New Politics reforms (1968-72), and support among low-income whites bounced back as soon as 1976.[48] Contrary to the impression that the white working class has been driven from the party by New Politics

---

[45] The Edsalls are typical in this regard. For a more recent example, see Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan, 2004).

[46] See Frances Fox Piven, "Structural Constraints and Political Development: The Case of the American Democratic Party," in Frances Fox Piven, ed., *Labor Parties in Postindustrial Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 236, Table 11.1.

[47] Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (New York: Russell Sage, 2008), 74 (emphasis added).

[48] See Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*, 73, Figure 3.2.

ideology or its institutional arrangements, it was the "new class" elite that seemed to have moved away from the Democratic Party.

What is most problematic, however, is the assumption on the part of the critics that because many of the leading officials of the AFL-CIO actively and vocally opposed party reform, the reforms *must have been* detrimental to the interests of the working class (and, therefore, in the interests of a different class).[49] This not only reveals a naiveté concerning the representation of workers' interests in the institutions of the trade union movement, but also distorts the actual dynamics of labor's relationship to the reform movement. In fact, while *most* of the leadership of the AFL-CIO did oppose reform, significant labor unions, such as the United Auto Workers (by then no longer affiliated with the AFL-CIO), supported it from the start, while still more allied with the New Politics movement around the candidacy of George McGovern when AFL-CIO president George Meany organized a boycott of the presidential election in 1972. As will be shown in later chapters, labor's relationship to the New Politics was crucial in accounting for both its successes *and* its failures. However, the nature of this relationship cannot be understood as a simplistic class opposition between blue collar workers and white collar reformers.[50]

If the electoral troubles afflicting the Democrats in the post-1960s period had little to do with the New Politics, and if the new class hypothesis fails to explain the causes or consequences of party reform, perhaps the critics remain on solid ground when they argue that the New Politics was fundamentally anti-party in orientation? According to Shafer, the reformers' "emphasis on the virtues of participation came, inevitably, at the

---

[49] See, for an example, Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*.
[50] This deficiency of the critics is pointed out in Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 86-7.

expense of an effort at building the party as an organization."[51] The New Politics most certainly sought to disempower party regulars' dominant hold over the determination of presidential nominees. And there was no doubt a minority tendency within the movement, perhaps best represented by Geoffrey Cowan, that did venerate the Progressive reformers of the early twentieth century who wanted to get self-interested party leaders out of the way through the use of primary elections and simply "let the people decide."[52] However, it does not necessarily follow, as critics insist, that the movement's reforms were "anti-party" or unconcerned with organizational matters. Again, Shafer offers a characteristic depiction of the effects of reform in both convention and primary states:

> Within the convention states, the party had moved from traditional party caucuses, where party officeholders came together to begin the [delegate selection] process, to participatory conventions, where any professed Democrat could come out to participate and where party officeholders *might be* at an active disadvantage. *At a stroke, then, the regular party had been unseated*. Within the primary states, the party had moved from delegate primaries, where local notables—usually party or community leaders—had been selected under their own names, to candidate primaries, where the name of the [presidential] contender was the dominant consideration and where the names of the delegates were not even necessarily presented. At a stroke, again, the *guaranteed* role of the regular party had been discarded.[53]

The passage contains a revealing jump in logic. Between the first and second sentences Shafer leaps from the initial (and rather vague) notion that party officeholders "might be" at a disadvantage when competing for a delegate spot in participatory conventions to the firm conclusion that "the regular party" had been "unseated." Just why

---

[51] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 127.
[52] Interview with Geoffrey Cowan (phone), 16 April 2016. See also, Geoffrey Cowan, *Let the People Rule: Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of the Presidential Primary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016).
[53] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 526 (emphasis added).

a party regular may be disadvantaged when competing against "any professed Democrat" for a delegate seat at the party's national convention is not clear. (One might think just the opposite is the case given the advantages of expertise and prestige of party professionals.) Whatever that disadvantage might be, it certainly does not follow that the regular party has been definitively "unseated." The New Politics reforms did not bar Democratic officeholders or party officials from participating in presidential nominations but, as the last sentence of the passage makes clear, only revoked their "guaranteed role" in the delegate selection process.

The passage from Shafer also reveals a conceptual elision of "party regular" with the "regular party," as if eliminating the special privileges of individual party officials and officeholders constituted dismantling the party organization itself. In the rare instances where the disempowerment of particular individuals did result in the end of local party organization as such, this argument ends up defending authoritarian political structures that even the most ardent defenders of the regular party cannot come to endorse explicitly. But the blurring of the boundary distinguishing party regulars from party organization undergirds the assertion that party reformers were anti-organization in their orientation. While the New Politics, like any movement, was an amalgam of ideas and tendencies, some of which evinced a clear impatience with organizational questions, the critics' charge of anti-organizational bias mostly misses the mark.

First, it is simply misleading to characterize the reform of the party's delegate selection methods as "weakening the party" when it was in itself an unprecedented assertion of *national party power*, not only over its state and local affiliates, but over the

state laws under which the subnational parties operated.[54] Thus, when state party practices deemed to violate the guidelines laid out by the Democrats' reform commission were a product of state law rather than just a matter of party custom, certification of state delegates to the national convention required that good faith efforts to change the offending laws through state legislatures be demonstrated before the party's Credentials Committee. (It was because state laws were eventually changed to accommodate the new national Democratic Party guidelines that reform of the presidential nominating system affected the Republican Party as well.) Neither the authority nor the capacity of the national party to formulate and impose a universal code of standards for local and state party governance existed prior to the reforms and therefore had to be built in the process of their implementation and enforcement. Critics who constrict the definition of the regular party to refer only to the capacity of state and local party leaders to control the selection of their party's presidential nominee are of course correct to interpret the New Politics reforms as having weakened this "regular party." But if the regular party were defined to include the national convention, the national committee, and their authority over the entire party apparatus then the advocates of the New Politics were party builders like no others.[55]

Secondly, the party building orientation of the New Politics movement is undeniable when the post-1972 phase of reform is brought back into the narrative. It is striking that this history makes no appearance in the neoconservatives' critical

---

[54] Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 209.

[55] To his credit, James Ceaser grants that one could see the reforms as strengthening the party if one focuses on the assertion of national party authority over its state affiliates. However, he concludes his point with the misleading assertion that "the reformers in the Democratic Party have used this power thus far to weaken the influence of existing state organizations and have made no effective provision for their replacement either by state organizations of a different sort or by a national organization." As we will see below, precisely the opposite is true. See James Ceaser, *Presidential Selection*, 291.

literature.[56] The very name of the official reform body – the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection – suggests that the New Politics was not only concerned with reforming delegate selection procedures but was also concerned with restructuring and *revitalizing* the party organization itself. As we will see, this included truly novel institutional innovations such as mandating midterm party conferences on public policy and codifying the party's first-ever constitution, the Democratic Party Charter.

Including the post-1972 struggle over the shape and functions of the national party organization in the narrative of the New Politics movement fundamentally conflicts with the central arguments of the neoconservative critics. Take, for instance, the claim that the reforms dismantled the national convention as the "deliberative body" of the party. The critics hold that by binding delegates in proportion to the results of open primaries and caucuses, the convention no longer "selects" the nominee but merely ratifies the outcome of the decentralized nominating system. This curtailment of the convention's brokerage function has allegedly weakened the institution's role in ameliorating intraparty conflicts or factional feuds. Indeed, Penn Kemble, executive director of the anti-reform organization, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), went so far as to argue that "the smoke-filled rooms in which these crucial compromises [were] hammered out can be [considered] among the most vital of America's democratic institutions."[57] Critics within the academy, such as Austin Ranney (also a CDM member), made the same argument, acknowledging that the party may be more open to

---

[56] For scholarship that does bring the post-1972 phase of party reform into view, but which is not anti-reform, see Crotty's *Decision for the Democrats* and *Party Reform*. For a more recent treatment that places the post-1972 phase of reform in the context of increasing party polarization, see Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," chapters 4 and 6.

[57] Memo from Penn Kemble to CDM Task Force on Democratic Party Structure, 15 March 1973, Civil Rights Department Box 42, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, 1973-1974, AFL-CIO Records, George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD.

participation, but at the cost of stability and success. He lamented that "all the new reforms … have sought wider participation and better representation, [but] not closer cohesion and tighter discipline," thus increasing the likelihood of continued intraparty conflict.[58]

But in actuality the New Politics did not seek to sideline the role of the national convention. On the contrary, viewing it as the primary and most representative party organ, reformers sought to enhance the deliberative functions of the party convention by mandating that midterm policy conferences – sometimes called "mini-conventions" – be convened in the off years between presidential nomination cycles so that party program and policy could be formulated without the added pressure of nominating a presidential candidate. Moreover, as a venue for policy debate and political strategy, the reformed conventions offered party activists a mechanism for calling officeholders to account on their implementation of the Democratic program between elections. This would have entailed developing the tighter cohesion and party discipline the neoconservatives mourn. But as we will see, the CDM played a decisive role in defeating such a reform proposal.

In fact, the pre-reform convention pined for by the critics was anything but an assembly of autonomous delegates concerned with organizational maintenance or party unity. More often, these were gatherings where local and state party leaders held complete sway over their delegations, most of which arrived with specific instructions from their party leaders on how to cast their ballots for the presidential nomination. In many cases, in fact, state delegates were bound by the unit rule to cast their votes as a bloc. So long as party leaders could control 51 percent of their delegation, they could override the preferences of the remaining 49 percent. In the event that delegations

---

[58] Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction*, 195.

declared themselves "unpledged" or cast themselves to a "favorite son" candidate before the first round of balloting, this was not out of genuine indecision about the best interests of the party, but a means of extracting promises of patronage or policy concessions from a candidate in exchange for a bloc of delegate votes.[59]

In sum, the partial and highly misleading account of the New Politics movement constructed by the anti-reform critics hinges on historiographical omission and false binaries. Its claims concerning social composition, organization building, and the longevity of the New Deal party fail to withstand close examination. The New Politics' project to democratize the Democratic Party entailed transforming it into a party of a different type, one that was both open at the grassroots and programmatically disciplined at the center. The critics are right to argue that reformers saw democratization as a means of promoting their policy goals in American politics. But they are mistaken to confine that policy agenda to the "class interests" of white collar elites.

Explaining the Critique

How do we explain the systematic mischaracterization of the New Politics movement that pervades the texts of its critics? As noted above, most of the principal arguments against the New Politics issued from partisans directly involved in the intraparty effort to uproot the reform coalition from its position of power. The arguments put forward for an academic audience repeat the same arguments as the memos, reports, and commentary offered by the members of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, albeit with greater

---

[59] Nakamura and Sullivan, "Neoconservatism and Presidential Nomination Reforms," 88-9.

detail and an added scholarly apparatus.[60] Those written by non-participants, such as Shafer, repeat the same fundamental and unproven conclusions of the CDM regarding the "new class" and "anti-party" bias of the reform movement.[61]

It is worth pointing out, as Wilson did in his original study of party amateurs, that there is a philosophical disagreement between two competing models of democracy in the clash between reformers and regular party professionals. The latter operate from a notion of democracy that centers its attention on competition *between* parties: democracy is giving voters a simple choice from at least two options. Since the marketplace of electoral competition will reward the party with whom voters most resonate, the means by which the party develops its message and image is of negligible consequence. On the other hand, for amateurs who emphasize the importance of mass participation, democracy is especially important *inside* parties, as a means of developing citizens' political education and ensuring responsive political representation.[62]

These contrasting philosophical differences have undergirded perspectives focused on explaining the practical problems of democratic politics in the modern world. Prior to the problems of the late 1960s, these analyses had in mind the origins of German fascism in the highly politicized and unstable Weimar Republic, which gave observers reasons to look upon high levels of political participation with suspicion.[63] As Edward

---

[60] Penn Kemble and Josh Muravchik, "The New Politics and the Democrats," *Commentary*, 1 December 1972; Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, "Strategy for Democrats," *The New Republic*, 15 August 1970.

[61] Though it is worth pointing out that Shafer acknowledges an intellectual debt to Austin Ranney and Nelson Polsby (the latter as dissertation supervisor), both of whom participated in the activities of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. See Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 551, 553.

[62] See Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat*, Chapter 12; as well as Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 [1942]), Chapter 22; and E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004 [1942].

[63] Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*.

Banfield argued in 1961, "those party systems that have been the most democratic in structure and procedure have proved least able to maintain democracy; those that have been most undemocratic in structure and procedure—conspicuously those of the United States and Britain—have proved to be the bulwarks of democracy and civilization."[64] Samuel Huntington raised a remarkably similar line of argument on the other side of what he called the "democratic surge" of the 1960s. For him, "democracy" refers to the balance of government authority and the forces seeking its limitation. However, the rapid expansion of political participation and egalitarian values in the 1960s had come at the costs of legitimacy for the systems of authority in the United States. A specifically distressing manifestation of this was within the Democratic Party, which had become "less of an organization, with a life and interest of its own, and more of an arena in which other actors pursue their interests." Interestingly, Huntington quotes a phrase of Al Smith employed by the New Politics movement, "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy," but registers his disagreement: "applying that cure at the present time could well be adding fuel to the flames."[65]

By diagnosing the crisis of the late 1960s as caused by an "excess of democracy," a program for "moderating" the increased demands for democratic participation and representation seemed to follow naturally.[66] However, if explicit critiques of democracy could be voiced within the discipline of political science, they gained little traction in the public sphere, where, as the critics acknowledge, the ideas had gained ground through the

---

[64] Banfield, "In Defense of the American Party System," 135.

[65] Samuel Huntington, "The United States," in *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975). For the reformers' use of Smith, see *Mandate for Reform: A Report of the Commission for Party Structure and Delegate Selection to the Democratic National Committee*, Box 157, Folder: Mandate for Reform, April 1970, George S. McGovern Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

[66] Huntington, "The United States."

1960s and 1970s. In response, opponents of the democratic insurgencies and their presence inside the Democratic Party cleverly framed their attack on the reforms in the rhetoric of the New Politics itself: its project was "elitist"; its use of affirmative action constituted an undemocratic "quota" system; and in privileging "special interests" over the will of the party's base, it resulted in electoral disaster.

Most puzzling, however, is that by omitting the post-1972 phase of the reform project from their accounts, anti-reformers have tended to overstate the success of the New Politics movement in transforming the party. Why is this the case? As my analysis in the proceeding chapters will make clear, the New Politics as a transformative force within the Democratic Party was decisively stalled by 1974, and had breathed its last gasp of life by 1978. But even though their most ambitious plans had been frustrated, the clock could not be turned back to the pre-1968 party system. Delegate selection methods had been permanently changed; state laws had been revised; candidate campaign strategies had altered accordingly. Most distressing to their critics, however, was that Democrats continued to lose, and lose tremendously, in presidential contests against Republicans. The 1980s delivered three humiliating defeats to Democratic presidential nominees. The CDM narrative, that the Democrats continued to lose because of the influence of the New Politics, proved functional to explaining this problem and was adapted by the political entrepreneurs in the Democratic Leadership Council.

While it is tempting to read history backward, imputing our contemporary knowledge of outcomes to political actors in the past, it would be an analytical error to conclude that the centrist and neoconservative opponents of the New Politics understood

that the their rival had been defeated.[67] The fact was that by the late 1960s the national Democratic Party was in crisis, and remained in crisis for nearly two decades thereafter. The depths of that crisis suggested that it was more than a party crisis; it was a crisis of the entire social and political order that had sustained Democratic majorities for well over a generation. It is not surprising that in their desperate search for an explanation for their defeat, concerned Democrats turned to (and turned against) the changes engineered by New Politics reformers.

But the fact that members of the CDM laid the blame for electoral disarray at the feet of the reformers suggests an inability to come to terms with the end of the New Deal order. In their minds, had the New Politics not burst on the scene and remade the party in their narrow interests, the party of New Deal liberalism could have weathered the storm and continued on as the majority party. Concerned actors, including the New Politics and its critics, struggled to comprehend the nature of the crisis and formulate a response toward the same end: revitalizing the party. As time would tell, the New Politics understood how dramatic a change was underway as they sought to move beyond the New Deal coalition. For their critics, however, who did not share the sense that the New Deal was over, what was truly disastrous about the party crisis was their belief about how avoidable it could have been. Perhaps this helps explain why the DLC succeeded where the CDM failed: the CDM looked backward with rose-colored glasses on the postwar Democratic coalition; the DLC, accepting the end of the New Deal, looked forward to a neoliberal Democratic order.

---

[67] Amel Ahmed, "Reading History Forward: The Origins of Electoral Systems in European Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (2010).

Reassessing the New Politics

Given the deficiencies of the existing accounts of the New Politics, this dissertation will offer a revisionist history of the movement that attempts to correct the misleading picture crafted by its critics. However, I will not offer a narrative of heroes and villains.

First, the critics' attacks on the New Politics' electoral consequences is based on the two erroneous assumptions: that the New Deal regime was politically stable; and that local and state level Democratic Party organizations were sufficiently "vital" to integrate legitimate interest group demands. This assumption is evident in the lack of attention paid to the party organization and its political dynamics prior to the advent of reform. Thus, as Chapter 2 will show, the New Deal order was full of contradictions, having drawn together increasingly divergent political blocs whose alliance became untenable by the late 1960s. From the 1930s to the mid-1960s, a party structure built on "states' rights" had sustained these contradictions, even if it was a diminishing ideological influence within the Democratic Party leadership.

Chapters 3 and 4 will analyze the making of the New Politics movement from its origins in the Mississippi credentials contest at the 1964 Democratic national convention to the antiwar insurgencies of Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in Democratic primaries of 1968. I will show how the antidiscrimination ruling issued by the Democratic National Committee in 1964 was developed into a far-reaching critique of undemocratic practices in the party's presidential nominating process. The party leadership's initial resistance to these internal challenges brought about its own legitimacy crisis in 1968 and helped pave the way for the success of the reform project.

Against those who have also imputed an anti-party, anti-organizational bias to the New Politics reformers, chapters 5 and 6 will show that the movement to democratize the party had at its core the intention to rebuild and revitalize the party as a national organization. That this goal was not achieved is better understood as the result of the internal party struggle in which many of the critics have participated rather than the unintended consequences of the New Politics' success.

While the critics are wrong to assert the reforms' empowerment of a "new class" elite within the party, they are right to direct attention to the nature of class politics in the reform struggle. However, class, understood here as a historical concept, refers not to any static set of interests dividing white collar from blue collar workers, but to a process that is expressed through historically evolved institutions that have internal dynamics of their own. Institutions not only express class interests; they come to co-constitute them as well. While it is true that most top officials in the AFL-CIO opposed reform, this was not based on a class conflict between blue collar workers and a white collar "elite" – though they often claimed it was. Rather, the AFL-CIO officials' decision to resist reform was about defending their institutional privileges with the Democratic leadership. Moreover, as suggested above, trade union resistance to party reform was far from universal. Unions in industrial, service, and public sectors of the economy not only shared similar social and political characteristics with the New Politics movement, but saw in it the chance to revitalize the labor movement as a more significant social force within American politics.[68]

I will show that the New Politics movement represented an insurgent force not only in the Democratic Party but within the labor movement as well. Instead of

---

[68] Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

representing a narrow band of elite reformers, the New Politics was a movement that sought to fundamentally reconfigure the inner workings of the political process in the hopes of realigning the political spectrum further to the left.[69] This reframing not only helps in establishing the goals for which the New Politics struggled, but also the wider implications of its defeat. As chapters 7 and 8 will demonstrate, once the institutional threat posed by party reform was neutralized, liberal and labor forces inside the Democratic Party did converge around a party platform demand for full employment policy. However, the failure to translate their platform for economic recovery into public policy provides a stark measure of the costs of defeating the New Politics. In the absence of any formal party mechanisms to discipline officeholders, including the president, labor policy success depended largely on union leaders' personal relationship with the Democratic president. Ironically, it had been the successful opposition of the labor leaders to the party reforms that had lost them the tools they needed when confronted with an intransigent Democratic Party in the face of increasing economic turbulence.

However, the failure of the New Politics movement cannot be explained by referring only to the power of its intraparty opponents. Party reformers wanted to transform the Democratic Party into a more programmatic, progressive party. The means by which to accomplish this, they argued, was its democratization. By opening the party to greater grassroots participation and holding officeholders accountable to the will of the rank and file, the Democratic Party would be realigned to the left. While the reformers were quite successful in opening the party up to greater participation of previously marginalized groups, the practical effects of that participation, and the notion of "democratization" underpinning it, suggests the internal limitations of the project and the

---

[69] Interview with Donald Fraser and Arvonne Fraser, Minneapolis, 24 November 2014.

51

movement that sponsored it. From this perspective, democratizing the party meant removing barriers to participation for those who were already demanding access. The reformed Democratic Party was meant to be a vehicle for the democratic movements of the 1960s and 1970s rather than an agent of democratization within the wider society, which would have involved taking on the responsibility of educating and politicizing citizens to support a new political project. This also meant that the New Politics movement was dependent on independent, extra-party sources of mobilization. Thus, when the wave of popular activism receded, the vitality of the New Politics movement went with it.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE SHADOW OF STATES' RIGHTS:
DEMOCRATIC PARTY STRUCTURE AND THE NEW DEAL COALITION

To those who say that we are rushing this issue of civil rights – I say to them, we are 172 years late. To those who say this bill is an infringement on states' rights, I say … the time has arrived for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights.
--Hubert Humphrey (1948 Democratic national convention)[1]

The reforms proposed and implemented by the New Politics movement had immediate and far-reaching consequences for the structure and operation of the national Democratic Party. Indeed, one of the principal features of reform – establishing national party supremacy over state party affiliates – required major changes at the subnational level in the rules and practices of state and local party organizations for both Republicans as well as Democrats. But as we have seen, while the post-1968 changes to the party's presidential nominating system feature prominently in the critics' accounts of the New Politics reforms, few devote sufficient attention to the structure and operation of the party before it was reformed. Without so much as offering comparative statics of the pre- and post-reformed Democratic Party, the critics' claims about reform and its implications are of dubious value. This systematic silence reflects a tacit framework that takes the pre-reformed party as the normative standard by which to judge the reforms. But by leaving the pre-reformed party uninterrogated, the critics overlook its shortcomings and contradictions. Not only does this fail to provide an adequate account of the unraveling of the New Deal coalition in the mid- to late 1960s, such an omission also functions to

---

[1] Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 17.

delegitimize the grievances of the New Politics movement, implicitly characterizing their demands for party democratization as inappropriate, overzealous, and reckless.

In this chapter I will correct this omission on the part of the critics by providing a description and analysis of the New Deal Democratic Party prior to the reforms. This will include not only describing the structure and functioning of the formal party apparatus but also analyzing the specific political dynamics produced by the relations among the three main coalitional players of the New Deal regime: the labor-liberal alliance; northern political machines; and southern party-states. These two areas of focus – structure and coalition – are not unrelated. Indeed, I will argue that the confederated structure of the national Democratic Party was an indispensible mechanism in reproducing the contradictory coalition undergirding the New Deal regime. A programmatic, disciplined, cohesive national party could never have simultaneously contained what political scientist Nicol Rae has described as "the most liberal and the most conservative elements … in American society."[2] Even though the executive-centered New Deal administration represented a substantial centralization of political power at the national level, the New Deal Democratic Party remained, as Hubert Humphrey protested at the 1948 Democratic convention, a party in the shadow of states' rights.

Attention to these contradictions and the federal party structure that maintained them also helps explain the limits of New Deal liberalism regarding African Americans' civil rights. As the fractious 1948 Democratic national convention displayed, the national Democratic Party had little ability or authority to discipline state party affiliates that defied the party platform or broke from the national ticket. On the contrary, as we will

---

[2] Nicol Rae, "Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007), 176.

see, the infamous Dixiecrat revolt at the 1948 Democratic national convention displayed *the capacity of state parties to discipline the national party* in moments of intense intraparty conflict. In the decade and a half following the upheaval, the Democratic leadership beat a cautious retreat on the issue of civil rights, despite the growth of the southern black insurgency and landmark federal court decisions spurring the movement forward. As Chapter 3 will show, it is no coincidence that when civil rights advocates challenged the policy failures of the New Deal coalition in the 1950s and 1960s, Democratic Party structure became one of its main targets of struggle.

States' Rights, Class Politics, and National Party Structure

In many respects, the Democratic Party that the New Politics reformers encountered in the late 1960s was fundamentally the same party structure which had been born well over a century before: a confederation of state parties with the sole purpose of capturing the national office of the presidency. While there were important efforts to check the power of state party leaders over the intervening period, which will be noted below, what is most impressive is the resilience of the states in the face of such efforts. This makes the task of reviewing the pre-reformed party fairly straightforward and easily traceable from its origins, which gave it its main characteristics.

While American politics has frequently been said to be "exceptional" in nature, few features of the American political system are as distinctive as its parties. Rather than a "contagion of the left," as Maurice Duverger famously depicted the spread of mass parties in Western Europe, the origin of American mass parties is better characterized as a "contagion of the post-revolutionary elite," specifically those members of the political

class competing for the office of the presidency.[3] In Western Europe, where propertyless citizens by and large lacked voting rights and civil liberties and responded by building mass organizations to break into the political system from the outside, political elites inside parliamentary institutions were compelled to construct rival mass organizations to try to retain office. Thus, European mass parties were "externally mobilized," originating as extra-parliamentary organizations pursuing full citizenship rights for working class citizens, but spreading throughout thereafter as elites were forced to mimic the mobilizing successes of subaltern social groups.[4] In the US, however, the revolutionary rupture of 1776 and the political dynamics that followed, especially the persistence of armed farmer militias, produced a very different pattern of party development with profound effects. As early as the 1790s, major policy disputes over the powers of the central state opened cleavages within the group of the founders, and ad hoc coalitions took shape along differing political visions for the nascent republic. The recently ratified US Constitution made no mention of political parties or how elections were to be organized and funded, allowing the rules guiding organized political contestation to be improvised by the states and an assortment of private actors. However, by the 1830s, in sharp contrast to Europe, extensive white male suffrage and popular selection of presidential electors in the American states presented contending elite groups with the opportunity to go out and mobilize mass followings behind their political coalition.[5] Inter-elite conflict over national power thus spiraled outward from the state into

---

[3] Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. Barbara and Robert North (London: Methuen, 1964), xxvi.

[4] Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 67-70.

[5] On the growth of suffrage, see Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

organized partisan competition in society, a dynamic that produced "internally mobilized parties."[6] Under the leadership of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, the Democrats built the world's first mass political party, mobilizing a heterogeneous group of farmers, laborers, and small business owners, all demanding greater access to political power and administrative spoils. The Jacksonians' political opponents responded in kind, building their own mass organizations around distinct ethnocultural, religious, and economic cleavages in their effort to win election and retake national power.[7]

Early and extensive suffrage for white male citizens and their mobilization into mass organizations improvised by political elites had lasting consequences for the class dynamics of American politics. While European working classes had forged durable forms of consciousness and organization in their collective struggle for full citizenship, the American working class was durably fractured and segmented, not only between rival party organizations that politicized laborers along distinct ethno-religious axes, but also between the white, male, native-born members, who enjoyed something close to full citizenship, and those who did not: women, African Americans, immigrants. This did not prevent American workers from engaging in forms of class organization. On the contrary, American workers engaged in enough sporadic strikes, riots, and acts of shop floor sabotage to qualify them as one of the most militant working classes of the nineteenth century. But the kinds of organizations that it did produce, such as the coalition of trade unions in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), premised their activities on protecting the wages and working conditions of relatively skilled workers, reinforcing the social hierarchies that skewed these abilities according to race, gender, and status. When,

---

[6] Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, 6-7.
[7] Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, 67-70.

in the Gilded Age that followed the Civil War, it seemed that the historic divisions within the American working class could be overcome by the development of more inclusive political organizations such as the Knights of Labor in the 1880s or the People's Party in the 1890s, those efforts failed due to a combination of state repression, internal conflict, and calculated absorption by the existing party system. After the historic election of 1896, when the Democrats cemented their lock on the southern states and assimilated the agrarian bloc, a dynamic of political demobilization set in, engineered by the architects of Jim Crow in the South, and facilitated in the North by the AFL's official policy of non-partisanship. Despite several attempts to forge a lasting alliance linking the AFL and the Democratic Party between 1906 and 1918, electoral demobilization and widespread voter abstensionism among workers would remain until the 1930s the overriding features of American class politics.[8]

Also setting American parties apart from their counterparts across the Atlantic was their material basis in patronage.[9] The contagious mass parties of Western Europe built centralized organizations around a large dues-paying membership, whose contributions funded local party branches in their community organizing and campaigning activities. Partisan identity was formed around a distinct ideology and party program, often promoting full citizenship for the working class constituents of the trade

---

[8] Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986), chapter 1; Walter Dean Burnham, "The United States: The Politics of Heterogeneity," in *Electoral Behavior: A Comparative Handbook*, ed., Richard Rose (New York: The Free Press, 1974); Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Why Americans Still Don't Vote and Why Politicians Want It That Way* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Ira Katznelson, "Considerations on Social Democracy in the United States," *Comparative Politics* 11 (1978).

[9] Patronage was, of course, not the only source of party finances. Big-ticket financial contributors, always important for both major parties in America, became more so as patronage became less of a viable resource for party officials in the post-WWII period. See, for example, Thomas Ferguson, *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

unions that supplied the dues-paying rank and file. American parties, by contrast, while not without their own ideological or programmatic content, throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century subsidized their mass mobilizing activities by exchanging material rewards for voters' support.[10] State and local party organizations distributed government jobs (for example, public administration, fire, police, sanitation), government contracts, business licenses, immigration cards, and more to their partisan clients, all with the expectation that recipients' votes as well as a percentage of their salaries would be offered in supported of the party come campaign season. It was the added material rewards of national power that motivated state parties to confer and agree upon a presidential candidate.[11]

But if the major American political parties were born at the national level, the phrase "national political parties" is something of a misnomer in the US context. Organizationally, the national Democratic Party was nothing more than a loose confederation of state Democratic parties, each unit sovereign and independent in its internal affairs and its external affiliations. The national party had no independent existence apart from the state parties when they met in convention, aside from the periodic meeting of its national committee, a body described by its foremost scholars as a "headless, drifting organization" that functioned only as an "umbilical cord" linking one convention to the next (see below).[12] The national party's exclusive reason for being was to nominate a candidate and assist their campaign for the presidency. Thus, outside the

---

[10] On ideology in the American party system, see John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For a rich, "thick description" of party activist-voter linkages in the mid-nineteenth century, see Richard Franklin Bensel, *The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[11] Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 134.

[12] Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy, *Politics Without Power: The National Party Committees* (New York: Atherton Press, 1964), vi.

quadrennial presidential election cycle, the national party could barely be said to exist as an organized force in American politics.

But every four years, for four or five days, the national party did, in David Broder's apt phase, "assume reality" in the form of the national convention.[13] As extra-constitutional entities, parties formulated their own rules regulating the nominating process, convention procedure, and intraparty governance. In fact, there were no standing codified rules between conventions; every convention began with approval of temporary rules, most often modeled off the rules of the convention four years prior. After the tradition of nominating a presidential candidate by congressional caucus collapsed in the 1820s, national conventions convened anywhere from a year to only three months prior to the general election, depending on whether or not the party had the advantage of incumbency. The advent of the convention system in the 1830s not only removed the nominating process from Washington, DC, it also fended off criticisms that the early congressional caucus system was undemocratic and unrepresentative.[14] Convention delegations were sent representing every state according to their size in the Electoral College, and until 1936 presidential aspirants need a two-thirds supermajority of their votes to win the nomination. Presidential nominees therefore had to find broad-based support across party factions hailing from different regions of the country and representing a diversity of interests. Vagueness and ambiguity suffused aspirants' campaign promises since the time of Jackson, ensuring broad consensus at the national level while providing substantial autonomy for state and local party candidates running

---

[13] David S. Broder, "Foreword," in James W. Davis, *National Conventions in an Age of Party Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), xv.
[14] Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 89. Partisans in congressional districts or states that did not have a party member in Congress were unrepresented in the caucus nominating process.

on the same party ticket. National nominating conventions also ratified the nominee's selection for vice president (often representing a rival Democratic faction to "balance the ticket"), approved a perfunctory party platform meant to attract votes rather than propose concrete policy alternatives, and served as a launching pad for the general election campaign.

While the quadrennial nominating convention was formally the highest authority in the party, decisionmaking power remained in the hands of the state party leaders. From 1832 to 1908, delegates to the Democratic conventions were selected by state party organizations making their choice through either district caucuses or state conventions or central committee appointments or some combination of the three.[15] Delegations were most often led by the top party officials in the state, and automatically invited ranking party officeholders such as senators, governors or big city mayors to attend as ex-officio voting members. The remainder of the delegation was most often composed of loyal state party officials and activists as a reward for their service. Even when state party leaders ascertained delegates' preferences before casting their votes for them, devices such as the unit rule were employed to increase a state leaders' bargaining power by binding the minority to cast their votes with the majority as a bloc. This facilitated the horse trading that took place between state party leaders, presidential candidates, and other major party or interest group actors in the "smoke-filled rooms" off the convention floor.[16]

However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the convention system's claim to representativeness came under challenge by Progressive reformers who alleged the delegate selection process was too tightly controlled by self-interested party leaders able

---

[15] Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 89.
[16] See Gerald Pomper, *Nominating the President: The Politics of Convention Choice* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963).

to marginalize elements in the party that did not meet their favor. Beginning in 1912, primary elections were introduced in many states' delegate selection process to circumvent the intermediation of state and local party organizations or their leaders. Primaries were state-conducted operations akin to general election balloting, where party voters, and sometimes Independents, could select their own delegates to represent the state at the national convention. However, primaries did little to dislodge the influence of party leaders over determining the eventual nominee. The share of convention delegates selected through primary mechanisms peaked in 1916 at just over 50 percent (back when winning 66 percent of the delegate votes was the necessary threshold for the party's nomination). In fact, in more than half the nominating contests under the mixed system of primaries and caucus-conventions the winner of the most primaries was denied the presidential nomination at the convention.[17] After World War I, amid the general crisis in Progressivism, party leaders rolled back the number of primary states, bringing their frequency down from twenty-six states in 1916 to fifteen states by 1935. The results of those that remained were often redefined as advisory rather than binding, leaving party leaders free to take their results under advisement at their discretion.[18]

If the national party was no more than a passive agent of the state parties, the national committee was little more than an agent of the party's presidential candidate, the titular party leader. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) was not formally organized until 1848 and functioned on an ad hoc basis until it established a year-round headquarters of operation in the 1920s. Its members, two from every state (one man, one woman after the Nineteenth Amendment), were elected by their respective state parties to

---

[17] Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 92.
[18] Davis, *National Conventions*, 33. See also, Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 91.

serve four-year terms and ratified by the national convention. The DNC chair was also officially elected by the convention, but party norms granted the nomination of the position to the presidential nominee, to whom the chair was ultimately accountable. When in possession of the Oval Office, the Democratic president orchestrated leadership over the national party through a liaison network of White House aides and party officials, mostly geared to securing reelection. Similar to delegate participants, DNC membership was often a reward for past service, typically held by those who were successful players in local and state party affairs. But the DNC had little independent influence in party affairs at the subnational level. While it sometimes served as a vehicle for patronage appointments, these were directed at the behest of the party nominee and normally redounded to his electoral prospects rather than the autonomy of the national committee. When it was not consumed with coordinating the general election campaign, although usually as a junior partner to candidates' personal campaign organizations, the DNC met periodically (one to three times a year) to plan the next nominating convention: selecting the site, allocating state delegates, drawing up a convention agenda, issuing the formal Call to Convention to the state parties, and coordinating the states' selection of an equal number of delegates to serve on the three standing convention committees. The Rules Committee drew up convention procedure. The Platform Committee drafted a statement of principles intended to reconcile party factions by combining planks submitted by the White House (if the party held the Oval Office), ranking party leaders in Congress, and interest group organizations. And the Credentials Committee certified that convention delegates were duly chosen according to state party rules or, in primary states, state law.[19]

---

[19] See Cotter and Hennessy, *Politics Without Power*; and Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party Building:*

In sum, the national Democratic Party was a creature of the state parties. As an electoral institution developed to coordinate competition for the presidency, the national party, whether embodied in the convention or the committee, lacked sufficient incentives or sanctions by which it could exert its authority over state affiliates. Its organizational structure, operation, and platform statements were intended to facilitate the successful election of a presidential candidate. In the context of the insurgent politics of the late 1960s, this party structure would come to be seen as an obstacle to many liberals' political goals, and the New Politics movement that ensued aimed to transform it.

The New Deal Coalition

The most successful era of Democratic Party politics in the twentieth century was without a doubt the period governed by the so-called New Deal coalition (1932-68). With the exceptions of Grover Cleveland (1885-89, 1893-97) and Woodrow Wilson (1913-21), Democratic control of the White House had remained elusive in the postbellum period. The rapid industrialization and transformation of the American economy in the wake of Reconstruction was a project conducted under the leadership of the Republican Party.[20] When that regime faltered in the crash of 1929, and the economic crisis deepened over the next election cycle, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic Party achieved a historic landslide electoral mandate, several times over, to reshape American politics in

---

Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). Strictly speaking, there were four standing convention committees in the Democratic Party from 1832-1968. I exclude the Committee on Permanent Organization from my account here because it did not feature significantly in later reform struggles and, in fact, was deemed so redundant by one of the post-1968 reform commissions that it was abolished altogether, with its functions transferred to the Rules Committee. See William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 199-200.

[20] See Richard Franklin Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1977-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

the name of economic recovery. The New Deal coalition constructed a new regime in American politics, institutionalizing a distinctive set of policies, discourses, and practices that embedded a new common sense about the relationship between state and society, one that would prove remarkably durable.[21]

What was most remarkable about the New Deal coalition, however, was the way in which it reshaped American class politics. While working class political mobilization had begun to reverse its secular decline in 1928 through the ill-fated presidential candidacy of northern urban Catholic Al Smith, the New Deal years saw not only increasingly active support from working class voters for Democratic candidates, but more significantly a veritable explosion of proletarian frustration that took overtly political forms. This included not only the massive strike waves of 1933-34, the famous sit-down strikes in the Midwest automobile plants, and the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) as a more radical, more politically engaged alternative to the AFL, but also the veterans' marches on the Capitol, the Hooverville tent cities erected across the American urban landscape, and the left-wing challenges to Roosevelt's political leadership, whether from Louisiana's Huey Long or Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California (EPIC) Party. By the mid-1930s, the Democratic Party alliance with the new labor movement formally reversed the long-standing depoliticization of the American working class, pulling it into mainstream politics and particularly into the Democratic Party.[22]

---

[21] David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[22] Michael Goldfield, "Worker Insurgency, Radical Organization, and New Deal Labor Legislation," *American Political Science Review* 83 (1989); William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009 [1963]); Steve Fraser, "The 'Labor Question,'" in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, eds, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Piven and Cloward, *Why Americans Still Don't Vote*, chapter 5; Alan

But the integration of labor into the Democratic Party did not result in the equivalent of an American labor party. This was because the party coalition forged under the auspices of the New Deal brought under the same umbrella a contradictory set of organized political actors whose success would eventually pave the way for its later crisis. The New Deal coalition had three organizational pillars within it: the labor-liberal alliance; northern political machines; and southern party-states. Below, I will examine each major player of the Democratic coalition in isolation before exploring their relations and the contradictory dynamics they produced.

The Labor-Liberal Alliance

As I stated above, the Great Depression was the pivotal moment in the history of the American labor movement and in its approach to national politics. An upsurge of labor organizing and militancy resulted in and flowed from favorable legislation such as the National Industrial Recovery Act and later the National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act) of 1935, recognizing the right of workers to form unions and institutionalizing their authority in systems of collective bargaining. The growth of industrial unionism through the breakaway CIO eclipsed the anti-statism of prior forms of solidarity organized through the AFL. Consequently, as the voluntarism of craft unionism was overtaken by the success of the CIO, a durable relationship took shape between American unions, New Deal administrators, and the Democratic Party.[23]

However, because the Democratic Party was not an internally uniform party, it is misleading to pose the labor-Democratic partnership in such general terms. Rather, as

---

Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage, 1995), chapter 9.
[23] Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

Andrew Battista has insisted, labor established an alliance with *a part of* the Democratic Party, namely its northern liberal wing.[24] Drawing liberals and labor together was a shared commitment to the expansion of federal capacities to restore stability to the political economy and an ideological discourse that emphasized a capacious notion of citizenship rights, especially the collective rights of industrial workers. The severity of the economic depression and the broader electoral realignment spanning the 1928 and 1936 election cycles provided liberals and labor unions with a common social and regional basis on which to come together, as well as a shared set of commitments and goals orienting their political strategy.

Crucial to this change was the launching of the CIO and its distinct mode of organizing workers. While the craft-based AFL had pursued a tenuous alliance with progressive Democrats earlier in the century, it had proved unstable and short-lived due to its narrow base in organizing white, skilled, male, and mostly native labor. The AFL's own skepticism toward partisan alliance, embodied in founder Samuel Gompers's pragmatic doctrine of "rewarding friends and punishing enemies," along with its very narrow policy demands (establishing a legal basis for private business unionism), had foreclosed the possibility that its leadership could plausibly speak on behalf of a wider class constituency. This lack of political vision on the part of the labor federation was mirrored in the Wilson administration's relatively disinterested perspective on the labor movement, for which it provided only limited protections, since most of the party's electoral support and congressional power came from southern and western states.

The CIO's break from this model included the creation of mass union organizations composed of semi- and unskilled workers across industrial sectors, such as

---

[24] Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 9-10.

auto, steel, electrical, and rubber. Because they attempted to organize all workers within these mass producing industries, CIO unions tended to have heterogeneous memberships, ranging across multiple skill levels, immigrant and ethnic groups, racial lines and gender divides. While far from always successful, such a diverse social base created the incentive for CIO unions to orient their political strategy toward broad-based, inclusive social policies that could establish an egalitarian framework necessary to pull divergent interests within the union federation together. The resultant "social unionism" of the CIO created, in the words of federation president Philip Murray, "a national movement devoted to the general welfare just as much as to the particular interests of labor groups."[25] The interests of labor and liberals therefore aligned along a progressive policy agenda that required enhancing federal capacities to regulate labor-management relations and provide social welfare benefits to those hardest hit by the Depression.

The labor-liberal alliance within the Democratic Party, far from being a "barren marriage," proved to be mutually beneficial, the latter supplying legitimacy and legal protections, the former providing enormous organizational resources to electoral activity.[26] Together, labor-liberals played a leading role in the formation and passage of key New Deal legislative milestones, including the National Recovery Act, the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act. In exchange for policy victories, the labor movement had come to function by 1936 as a fully-fledged electoral organization for the party in many major industrial states (with a large share of the Electoral College). Through official bodies, such as Labor's Nonpartisan League, as well as through unofficial channels, labor performed a variety of

---

[25] Philip Murray, quoted in Battista, *Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 29.
[26] See Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, chapter 2.

functions for the Democrats, including registering and mobilizing voters, collecting campaign contributions, distributing literature, and even aggregating diverse interests across Democratic constituencies such as civil rights groups. After Republican victories in the 1942 midterm elections, the CIO launched its Political Action Committee (PAC) as a permanent campaign apparatus. In establishing a network of state organizations, the CIO-PAC sought "to create a new 'CIO voter' whose adherence to the New Deal wing of the Democratic Party would become as natural and reliable as that of a British laborite or European social democrat."[27] As J. David Greenstone concluded in his study of American labor politics, "organized labor functioned as the most important nationwide electoral organization for the Democratic party."[28]

While the CIO (and later, after 1955, the merged AFL-CIO) was a relatively successful force in getting out the vote for Democratic candidates in some large industrial states, the nature of the labor federation's political activity did not effectively encourage the formation of a collective identity of liberal Democratic worker-voters. On the contrary, for all its *electoral success*, labor's Committee on Political Education (COPE) had ironically little *educational capacity* when it came to engaging rank-and-file workers around the federation's social-democratic agenda being pursued in Washington.[29] With a decentralized organizational structure, liberal labor leaders could not compel State Federations of Labor and municipal Central Labor Councils to engage in coordinated political activity at state and local levels. This resulted in a bifurcated labor movement

---

[27] Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 84.

[28] J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 69-70.

[29] Alan Draper, *A Rope of Sand: The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1955-1967* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

that was simultaneously in the vanguard of progressive action at the national level and an unreliably liberal force at subnational levels.[30]

These divisions within the labor movement reinforced the leadership's reliance on the national level of political power, especially the presidency, as a conduit to public policy influence. As an important source of electoral support, labor's point of leverage was on the selection of presidential nominees. This is confirmed by COPE's own records. Long-time treasury secretary and eventual president of the AFL-CIO, Lane Kirkland, once described it as "a tacit, invisible but real arrangement" between top trade union officials and leaders of the Democratic Party.[31] But labor, he continued,

> didn't go out and seek delegates [for the national convention]. That wasn't the instrument through which we influenced events. … We had a bargaining relationship with the *leadership* of the party. …[T]he party leaders knew that, in the general election, they needed labor to draw some of the water and hew some of the wood. The leaders of the party wanted to win. They wouldn't nominate anyone who was too offensive to the trade union movement. So, we would hold discussions, and our wishes would be made known to those who were particularly active in party affairs.[32]

As we will see, labor's institutional embeddedness within the a pattern of elite brokerage with the party leadership would place top trade union officials in a precarious position vis-à-vis the New Politics movement's participatory reforms.

---

[30] Margaret Weir, "'Beyond the Plant Gates': Postwar Labor and the Organizational Substructure of Liberalism," Institute for Research on Labor and Employment Working Paper 194-09, October 2009, available online at www.irle.berkeley.edu.

[31] Remarks of AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland at Meeting of State Federation Officers, "Labor in Partisan Politics," 29 September 1982, Committee on Political Education Files (unprocessed), AFL-CIO Records, George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD.

[32] Kirkland, "Labor in Partisan Politics," COPE Files (emphasis added).

Northern Political Machines

Prior to the New Deal, the Democrats' base of electoral strength stretched across the southern states. However, the party also had important bastions of partisan support north of the Mason-Dixon line. Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century these bastions took the characteristic organizational form of American politics: the political machine. While most typically associated with urban governance due to high-profile machines such as New York's Tammany Hall, Frank Hague's New Jersey organization, or the famous Chicago Democratic Party under Mayor Richard Daley, machine organizations dotted the American electoral landscape, stretching past city limits into suburban and rural communities as well.[33] Powered by patronage, these hierarchical local party structures mobilized electoral coalitions through armies of party activists, campaign workers, ward and precinct captains, and partisan voters. Due to the high ratio of elective to appointive positions at the local level, government jobs were the most common currency transacted (one out of three New York Democratic voters held a Tammany job in the 1910s; Chicago's Cook Country Democratic Party distributed as many as 30,000 jobs as late as the 1970s), but material rewards for partisan loyalty also included immigration and naturalization assistance, public service provision, shots of whiskey or the famed Christmas turkey.[34]

Aside from its impressively robust mobilizing capacities, another vital function of any political machine was to control the local or state nominating processes. As one

---

[33] David R. Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Settings, and Government Activity in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[34] Gary Gerstle, *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the Founding to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 153, 175; Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 135; Alan DiGaetano, "Urban Political Reform: Did it Kill the Machine?" *Journal of Urban History* 18 (1991).

infamous Tammany boss is reputed to have said, "I don't care who does the electing, just so [as] I can do the nominating."[35] Machine control was especially easy when local nominating contests were conducted through caucus-conventions, where machines could handily provide the majority of participants. Turn of the century Progressive reformers who attempted to supplant machine power with the direct primary had greater success in regions not already monopolized by machine bosses, such as the western and mountain states.[36] However, even in those places, "good government" reform coalitions often constructed machines of their own, reshaping electoral institutions and public policy to bias incumbent reform administrations.[37] When introduced in the Northeast and Midwest, primaries proved ineffective in the face of the machines, which could heavily influence voter turnout and delegate slate making. Once tamed, primaries posed no real threat to machines bosses who, by the 1940s and 1950s, had become what Leon Epstein calls their "masters."[38]

While on the eve of the Great Depression political control of America's largest cities was roughly split between Republican and Democratic Party organizations, with the success of Roosevelt's New Deal, the largest political machines across the nation "became an entirely Democratic phenomenon."[39] Where it was once thought that the coming of the New Deal and the strengthening of federal welfare provisioning signaled the "last hurrah" of machine politics, the New Deal's actual relationship with big city bosses is much more complex. As Lyle Dorsett pointed out in his now-classic study, New

---

[35] William Marcy Tweed, quoted in Davis, *National Conventions*, 4.
[36] Shefter, *Political Parties*, chapter 5.
[37] Jessica Trounstine, *Political Monopolies in American Cities: The Rise and Fall of Bosses and Reformers* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[38] Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, 139.
[39] Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics*, 324.

Deal programs financed from Washington continued to be "*directed* at the local level," making the local machines of continuing relevance to the New Deal administration.[40] Roosevelt showed himself willing to ally with city bosses that accepted and worked to implement New Deal goals, even when those goals served to reinforce the stability of the machine.

However, if the New Deal did not sweep away most of the political machines of an earlier era, it did transform the conditions under which they operated, which in turn had dramatic effects on their form and operation. From the perspective of America's cities and their governing regimes, nothing about the New Deal was as revolutionary as its urban policy – the first sustained federal effort of its kind. Creating a series of agencies, such as the Civil Works Administration, the Public Works Administration, and the Work Progress Administration to address the pressing issues of relief, infrastructure, and public housing, the New Deal not only "presented no great threat" to local machines, but actually offered a promising opportunity for local political entrepreneurs to pull together a wide-ranging coalition, ranging from mayors to business to professional planners to city bureaucrats, all of whom had an interest in the expansion of federal urban programs.[41] As John Mollenkopf has shown, Democrats made two discoveries in this moment, each of which transcended some of the limitations of the earlier machine era: "that they could bring together formerly feuding urban constituencies," such as machines and reformers, big business and labor, blue collar ethnics as well as minorities, in which "each could find reasons to be united behind a program for growth and development."

---

[40] Lyle W. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977), 113 (emphasis in original).
[41] Harvey Boulay and Alan DiGaetano, "Why Did Political Machines Disappear?" *Journal of Urban History* 12 (1985), 33.

Secondly, federal urban programs not only brought together a coalition of interests but also united them organizationally under the banner of the party and linked them directly to Washington. Thus, "they could augment and ultimately replace the particularism and uncertainty of the old-fashioned machine with a new kind characterized by bureaucratic certainty and funded by the US Treasury." Ultimately, urban Democrats and their partners in Washington discovered that "government programs could solidify national political power" by knitting together a patchwork network of urban power centers.[42]

Urban political machines and their city bosses were therefore not displaced by the New Deal state so much as they were transformed into "pro-growth regimes" and came to serve as the local representatives of the New Deal's state-sponsored development agenda.[43] New Deal urban policy provided the material basis for a massive quantitative expansion of this coalition around a program of redevelopment. This was especially important because many large industrial cities continued to receive waves of African American in-migration from the South and rural areas generally. Shrewd political bosses used New Deal resources as a means to integrate these new populations with impressive success. As Nancy Weiss has shown, blacks in the urban North made a dramatic leap into the Democratic column between 1932 and 1936. Such a transformation was due to the fact that African Americans, as a group that was predominantly working class, overwhelmingly approved of and benefited from New Deal relief programs, despite all the racial barriers in New Deal public policy (see below). Republican opposition to FDR's agenda, especially those agencies that most directly benefited African Americans

---

[42] John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 43-4.

[43] Robert Salisbury, "Urban Politics: The New Convergence of Power," *The Journal of Politics* 26 (1964); Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007 [1987]).

such as the Works Progress Administration, sharply accelerated blacks' conversion from the party of Lincoln to the party of Roosevelt.[44]

In the short run, then, New Deal relief money helped sustain Democratic machines, if in modified form. In the long run, however, the transformation of America's cities wrought by federal policy ultimately weakened local party structures. New Deal era programs and their postwar counterparts helped spur greater geographic mobility on the part of many populations, including those ethnic constituencies mobilized by the older vintage of Democratic machines, who began leaving urban centers for the relatively new suburban zones in larger and larger numbers after World War II.[45] This was not only a result of the federal subsidization of suburban development, which acted as a positive draw on urban ethnics, but equally the disruptive and displacing effects of urban renewal programs, which most often subsidized the construction of downtown redevelopment schemes rather than the creation of affordable public housing.[46] The resulting demographic recomposition of northern cities consequently disrupted patronage networks that had developed and sustained ethnically homogenous neighborhoods of an earlier era.[47]

Even if the pervasiveness of machines in American electoral politics was on the wane by the late 1960s, their legacy appeared alive and well for New Politics activists in the figure of Chicago mayor Richard Daley, who had overseen the violent police crackdown on convention protesters in 1968. For them, Daley typified, if in exaggerated

---

[44] Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[45] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[46] Alan DiGaetano, "The Democratic Party and City Politics in the Postindustrial Era," in *Labor Parties in Post-Industrial Societies*, ed., Frances Fox Piven (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 217.

[47] Alan Ware, *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

form, the undemocratic influence of party leaders on the selection of presidential nominees and, by extension, the content of party program that extended all the way down to the grassroots. Democratizing the Democratic Party would set it sights on removing these leaders' influence in the national party.

Southern Democratic Party-States

In the South, state Democratic parties were integral components of the racialized social order known as Jim Crow. Indeed, southern state Democratic parties had been instrumental in coordinating resistance to Reconstruction after the withdrawal of federal troops in 1877, ultimately overseeing the consolidation of what Robert Mickey has called "enclaves of authoritarian rule." [48] Over the ensuing three decades, Democrats spearheaded the southern campaign for white supremacy and the defense of states' rights. Through the disfranchisement of freedpersons and poor whites, as well as extensive voter fraud, corruption, and paramilitary violence, anti-Democratic sources of partisan competition, whether Republican or Populist, were eliminated, leaving all public offices, government appointments, and state resources at the exclusive command of Democratic elites. It is no exaggeration to say that by the turn of the twentieth century southern Democratic parties and the states of the former Confederacy had become so deeply integrated they constituted one-party authoritarian regimes. As one prominent southern judge put it at the time, "The State … is the Democratic party. …[And] the interests of the party … are the interests of the State."[49] On the eve of the New Deal, southern

---

[48] Robert Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Mickey bases his characterization of authoritarianism on a minimalist, procedural conception of democracy.
[49] Thomas J. Semmes, quoted in Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 44.

Democratic party-states presided over a reconstituted racialized political economy based on sharecropping and tenancy in agriculture, with a residual low-wage labor market centered on southern industry. Jim Crow and the one-party Democratic South were born together and remained inextricably linked.[50]

Within each of these authoritarian enclaves, organized political conflict became deinstitutionalized from anything resembling a genuine party system, building little in the way of vote-mobilizing machinery. As V.O. Key once observed, the one-party South was really a no-party South.[51] In place of a competitive party system stood the all-white primary election. Because all politicians were Democrats, southern politics took on especially intense forms of factional competition for party nominations. Southern elections therefore emphasized candidates' individual personalities and reputations, and entailed the continual building and rebuilding of personalized campaign organizations, often on the basis of patronage promises and accords with local economic elites.[52]

In national bodies such as Congress, southern Democrats were the face of the Jim Crow order and sought to defend local arrangements from federal intervention accordingly. While this may seem to suggest an inherent antipathy between Dixie Democrats and the liberal New Deal administration of Franklin Roosevelt, the two groups found grounds on which to cooperate. Indeed, southern Democrats – governors, state legislators, members of Congress, and intellectuals – were, with few exceptions,

---

[50] C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1955]; V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984 [1949]; Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); and Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*.
[51] Key, *Southern Politics*, 16.
[52] Key, *Southern Politics*, 11.

eager New Dealers from the start. There were several reasons for this. On the one hand, as home to most of those that were "ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished," the South was in desperate need of federal assistance. With a regional economy predominately geared to cash crops, the South was especially vulnerable to market fluctuations. Southern poverty, as bad as it was prior to the New Deal, had deepened dramatically during the Great Depression. By 1933 state and local relief systems as well as charity organizations had been stretched to the breaking point. On the other hand, the New Deal administration was in desperate need of southern support. New Deal legislation required southern votes if it was to pass successfully through Congress. The continuing influence of Herbert Hoover and Robert Taft in the Republican Party guaranteed a high degree of partisan hostility to Roosevelt in Congress, making the solid Democratic South even more important as a dependable New Deal bloc. Thus, as Ira Katznelson and his coauthors have put it, "even at the height of the New Deal, the Democratic party required the acquiescence of southern representatives, who as potential coalition partners for Republicans could, if they chose, block the national program."[53]

The New Deal's dependence on the southern wing of the party, however, came at a price. As the political representatives of Jim Crow, southern Democrats, whether liberal New Dealers or reactionary racists at heart, made the maintenance of the region's racialized political economy the key condition for their political support. More than just congressional votes were on the line. The power of the region within the New Deal coalition was the result of specific institutional arrangements that gave disproportionate

---

[53] Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950," *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (1993), 285. See also, James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1967).

influence over the shape and content of federal policy to southern public officials. Within Congress, committee appointments were distributed according to seniority. Southern congressmen, hailing from the safe districts shielded by the authoritarian party-states of the South, accumulated lengths of service that secured their hold over powerful committee chairs. Between 1933 and 1952, they held nearly 50 percent of all such Senate and House positions. From these seats of power they exercised control over the scheduling of hearings, the terms of debate and deliberation, and whether proposed legislation would come to the floor for a vote. This provided them with not just the veto power of obstruction but also the capacity to positively shape the New Deal's legislative agenda.[54]

The paramount economic concern motivating southern legislators, however, was to preserve the significant wage differential that existed between the northern and southern regions of the American economy. Southern agriculture and industry were labor-intensive sectors that depended for their viability on a cheap, tractable workforce. Racial segregation and the relative absence of unions, by disciplining black and white workers alike, facilitated the South's development strategy. As Nelson Lichtenstein has noted, "no set of politicians was more sophisticated in understanding the extent to which the New Deal's legitimization of the union movement and its orientation toward a rationalized, national labor market subverted the power of the old oligarchy and

---

[54] In their reexamination of V.O. Key's classic study of southern congressional cohesion, Katznelson et al. rightly point out that by restricting the question of the power of the South in Congress to roll call votes Key overlooks the filibuster and control of committee chairs as two institutions shaping the legislative agenda. See their "Limiting Liberalism"; as well as Key, *Southern Politics*, Part Two. For a comprehensive study of Congress as an institutional terrain of struggle, and the South's use of it in defending Jim Crow, see Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and its Consequences, 1948-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a descriptively rich portrait of the Senate as a tool in the hands of the South, see Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson III* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), Part I.

threatened the region's low-wage advantage."[55] Southern Democrats thus used the variety

of institutional tools at their disposal to filter apparent threats to Jim Crow from New

Deal legislation. These included securing occupational exemptions for domestic and

agricultural workers – the vast bulk of whom were black – from the National Recovery

Act, the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, and the Federal Labor

Standards Act. Additionally, Federal Economic Relief and Works Progress

Administration officials routinely purged southern clients from the relief rolls when

harvest season approached, assuring planters of a plentiful supply of cheap wage

laborers.[56]

The southern bloc also exercised its power in the Democratic Party at the

quadrennial nominating conventions, where the two-thirds supermajority rule in place for

nearly a century gave southern states a de facto veto over the party's national ticket. This

had made southern party leaders the key convention powerbrokers in 1920 and 1924

when the region gave the party some 90 percent of its Electoral College votes. Indeed, the

1928 Democratic platform had affirmed the "Rights of the States" when it declared that

"the constitutional rights and powers of the states shall be preserved in their full vigor

and virtue. These constitute a bulwark against centralization and the destructive

---

[55] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 111.

[56] See Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 19. The literature on the racialized and gendered dimensions of New Deal federal policy is vast. Some early contributions include Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jill Quadragno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Michael K. Brown, *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

tendencies of the Republican Party."[57] However, as we will see below, southern leverage at the convention had been swept away in the Roosevelt landslide of 1932, when the region's share of the Democratic vote fell to 26 percent.[58]

Most of the time President Roosevelt's pragmatism militated against confrontations that would be politically costly. Generally speaking, his administration accepted the prevailing distribution of power and sought to work with it. For instance, a number of bills were introduced in Congress throughout the Depression to address the rise in racial violence across the nation. But anti-lynching legislation received no direct support from the Oval Office. Walter White, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), recounted Roosevelt to have said: "If I come out for an anti-lynching bill now, they [southern Democrats] will block every bill I ask Congress to pass to keep America from collapsing. I just can't take that risk."[59]

There were, however, instances when the president did attempt a high-profile political intervention in the structure and operation of the New Deal coalition. Roosevelt, while harboring reservations about angering southern Democrats during his first term, gave private support to Democratic National Committee chair James Farley to organize convention delegate votes for the repeal of the two-thirds supermajority rule governing Democratic nominations. Southern delegations to the 1936 convention were almost

---

[57] "Democratic Party Platform of 1928," The American Presidency Project, available at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu, cited in Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 132.

[58] Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 111.

[59] Walter White, quoted in Harvard Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners," in *The New Deal and the South: Essays*, eds, James Charles Cobb and Michael V. Namorato (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 118. This is not to say that Roosevelt ever hesitated to publicly condemn lynching as "murder" or to speak out in favor of universal voting rights. He did, and quite forcefully at times. The point is that he did not make these issues legislative priorities as such. For a discussion, see William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 64-5.

unanimously opposed to repeal. However, in their newfound status as a minority in the party, they were unable to block the rule change.[60] The 1936 convention was also the first in the party's history to welcome African American delegates as well as the first black Democratic member of Congress. Roosevelt also invited a black minister to deliver the opening ceremonial address, so offending South Carolina's Senator "Cotton Ed" Smith that he walked out of the convention hall, declaring, "that ain't my kind of democracy."[61] The president also convened an advisory "black cabinet" of New Deal staffers, and established a Colored Division at the Democratic National Committee to better integrate northern black voters into the party.[62] However, Roosevelt's 1938 attempt to "purge" several southern Democratic opponents from Congress by publicly supporting their primary challengers was largely unsuccessful, and signaled the beginning of sustained congressional opposition to the national party leader from the southern party-states.[63]

In response to southern demands to respect "local conditions" or "states' rights" New Deal federal programs were administered by local and state officials, placing discretionary authority in the hands of southern Democrats to implement federal policies in ways that reinforced the color line. However, it was not simply a lack of political will to challenge southern Democrats that resulted in the compromises of the New Deal. A far more imposing obstacle was a lack of institutional capacity. For all the capacities built during the New Deal period, the federal government lacked ability to design and

---

[60] Harold F. Bass, Jr., "Presidential Party Leadership and Party Reform: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Abrogation of the Two-Thirds Rule," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18 (1988).
[61] Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 107, 93; Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 135-6.
[62] Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 136-7; Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, chapter 7; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 77-83.
[63] Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). See also, Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism*.

implement universal, standardized programs.[64] The early twentieth century had seen significant growth of the federal government, but, as Thomas J. Sugrue has observed, "when it came to the question of race relations, the United States was still a nation of courts and parties."[65]

In sum, it is not hard to understand why the democratizing goals of the New Politics movement would object to these kinds of political arrangements. As we will see, its project to democratize the Democratic Party originated in the civil rights movement that struggled against southern party-states in the 1950s and 1960s. While the federal government had delivered the deathblows to the Jim Crow regimes of the South by 1965, the practices (and abuses) of Democratic party-states would feature prominently in shaping the contours of reform proposed by New Politics activists in the wake of the 1968 party crisis.

The Contradictions of the New Deal Coalition

The New Deal coalition brought to life one of longest lasting regimes in American political history. However, its internal contradictions, centering primarily on African American civil rights, would eventually drive the coalition apart by the mid-1960s. Claiming that the New Deal coalition was internally contradictory is not simply to assert that, like any governing regime in a large republic, it combined "in the same orbit interests and ambitions that in other circumstances could be expected to be regularly at

---

[64] Margaret Weir, "States, Race, and the Decline of New Deal Liberalism," *Studies in American Political Development* 19 (2005).

[65] Thomas J. Sugrue, "All Politics is Local: The Persistence of Localism in Twentieth-Century America," in *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*, eds, Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 311.

loggerheads."[66] While it is true that Democratic administrations of the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1960s welded together an impressively stable political coalition of strange bedfellows, what was truly *contradictory* was the way the coalition's success undermined the conditions necessary for continued alliance.

While the primary conflict in the New Deal regime centered on the struggle for African American civil rights, it is not the case, as is often asserted, that the New Deal coalition was internally divided by the "unresolved issue of race."[67] Such a claim posits an ahistorical, static conception of race that fails to account for why what was apparently unresolved in the 1930s, when the coalition was built, became a deal breaker later in the 1960s, when it fell apart. Such a pat characterization also implies that interests supporting or opposing civil rights for black Americans were exogenously given, providing little room for politics to play any significant role in the formation of interests. On the contrary, it was the dynamics produced by the success of the New Deal regime that simultaneously promoted the cause of African-Americans' civil rights while also stifling its realization.

First, at a discursive level, the aggressively interventionist New Deal agenda had renewed hope that the federal government might act boldly on behalf of the poor and insecure – and by extension, African Americans – while the subsequent mobilization for WWII infused that hope with the concept of universal democratic rights. Wartime rhetoric and government propaganda vilified the racist ideologies of European and

---

[66] Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, "Regimes and Regime Building in American Government: A Review of the Literature on the 1940s," *Political Science Quarterly* 113 (1998-99), 696.

[67] A classic in this vein is Thomas Edsall and Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991). For a recent example of this argument, see Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (2008).

Japanese fascism and depicted the worldwide military conflict as the struggle "between human freedom and human slavery."[68] Roosevelt himself defined the goals of Allied victory as the protection of the Four Freedoms – freedom of religion and speech, freedom from fear and want – which were the "rights of men of every creed and every race, wherever they live."[69] By uniting black and white soldiers and members of the public against a common enemy, such a capacious doctrine of rights, and the government activism to defend and secure it, had a galvanizing effect on advocates of racial justice.

Second, for all the effort by southern congressional Democrats to preserve the Jim Crow order, federal New Deal and wartime policies could not help but restructure the southern political economy and consequently destabilize the region's racial hierarchy. Federal agencies such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Agriculture Adjustment Administration (AAA) wrought sweeping changes in southern agriculture and industry. Labor-saving technology, however, came mostly at the expense of unskilled, black labor. Among the many black southerners displaced, the NRA came to be known as the "Negro Removal Act."[70] Mobilization for WWII brought even greater federal presence to the region, sharply accelerating the industrial and urban development processes already underway. Almost half of all federal expenditures for military base construction were directed to the South, creating boomtown conditions that drew in the rural population. The rapid installation of military bases and defense-related infrastructure initiated "a sort of agricultural enclosure movement across the South" as

[68] Franklin D. Roosevelt, quoted in Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 223.
[69] Roosevelt, quoted in Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, 223.
[70] Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 29.

"farms and forests became factories and arsenals."[71] The resultant dislocation of tenants and sharecroppers fed the growing out-migration of African Americans, initiated after World War I, toward large industrial cities of the North.[72]

Third, as black Americans arrived in northern cities in greater numbers, the calculus of electoral politics began to shift. Democratic politicians and political machines began to make inroads with a population that, when they were not barred from exercising their right to vote, had been overwhelmingly committed to the party of Lincoln. While the Republicans had turned away from protecting the rights of African American citizens after 1876, GOP platforms continued to draw on the legacy of the Great Emancipator. The national Democratic Party, in contrast, featured no such rhetoric, and while some northern state party platforms began advocating for African American' civil rights, its southern party-states often continued to explicitly endorse the cause of white supremacy and states' rights. Nonetheless, the New Deal's appeal and the Republican's hostile response shifted African Americans' partisan loyalties to the Democrats, linking the party, as both ally and antagonist, to the nascent civil rights movement.[73]

Finally, while the labor-liberal alliance had fully committed itself to working within the New Deal Democratic Party, labor-liberals were not content with the party as it was. In fact, labor-liberals viewed the southern wing of the party as the primary obstacle standing in the way of advancing the New Deal agenda, especially after the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, passed over President Harry Truman's veto with the full support of

---

[71] Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 94. See also Pete Daniel, "The New Deal, Southern Agriculture, and Economic Change," in *The New Deal and the South*.

[72] Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1982]).

[73] Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*.

southern Democrats, established an effective firewall against significant unionization below the Mason-Dixon line.[74] Formulating a strategy of "realignment," labor-liberals sought to consolidate a range of progressive forces inside the Democratic Party while simultaneously pushing political conservatives into the Republican fold. Jack Kroll, head of the CIO-PAC and later COPE, best diagnosed the problem when he wrote in a confidential memo to the United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther after the disastrous 1952 election that the party status quo was "intolerable."[75] Articulating a perspective that would become commonplace among New Politics activists after 1968, Kroll bemoaned the decentralized power structure confronting labor-liberals inside the party, which, he said, resulted in an incoherent policy agenda that would continually frustrate the interests of the union movement. "The congressional branch of the party could be completely opposed to pro-union legislation, even though the national convention, the democratically-chosen voice of the party, had gone on record as favoring such legislation."[76] The proposed target of labor-liberals' realignment strategy was the "solid South" of Democratic conservatism. If the conservative monopoly over Democratic party-states could be broken, the enemies of the labor movement in Congress could be replaced with union-friendly liberals. However, after the failure of Operation Dixie, the CIO's major postwar effort at organizing the South, COPE looked to the growing activist movement of southern blacks, seeing the overthrow of Jim Crow as the

---

[74] The Taft-Hartley Act, or the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, amended the 1935 Wagner Act by requiring all unionists sign an affidavit foreswearing association with Communists, restricting use of solidarity strikes and secondary boycotts, and banning the union closed shop, whereby all employees in a firm were compelled to join the union. See Zieger, *The CIO*, 246-9; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 114-8.
[75] Jack Kroll, quoted in Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 93.
[76] Jack Kroll, quoted in Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 93.

surest way to realign southern Democratic parties.[77] By the early 1960s, the AFL-CIO leadership in Washington was transferring funds to civil rights organizations in the South, often covertly so as to not inflame the racial prejudices of local members.[78]

Thus, the very operation of the New Deal coalition seemed to push in multiple, mutually incompatible directions at once and had deleterious effects on the party's organizational infrastructure. The democratic rhetoric of the Roosevelt administration seemed flexible enough to extend to African Americans (and later, many others) the full citizenship status traditionally accorded only to white males. The party-states of the South sought simultaneously to modernize their political economy while also retaining its racial order. Meanwhile, black voters began figuring as a larger factor in the electoral setting of large industrial cities, and labor-liberals looked to shift the balance of party power in Congress by extruding the long-standing bastion of solid Democratic support, the southern party-states, from its halls altogether. To be sure, there were policies and perspectives that drew the contradictory coalition together. Regime leaders, especially those in the executive, crafted durable coalitional links around a policy framework of economic growth, liberal internationalism, and cold war anticommunism.[79] Nevertheless, in this context civil rights for black Americans came to reflect of the balance of power in the New Deal regime as a whole. Progress or retrenchment on this terrain would be determined by the struggle inside the party.

---

[77] Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).
[78] Draper, *A Rope of Sand*, 106-11.
[79] On postwar growth liberalism, see Alan Wolfe, *America's Impasse: The Rise and Fall of the Politics of Growth* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Civil Rights, Party Federalism, and the Limits of New Deal Liberalism

Because the major political conflicts of the New Deal era unfolded mainly within the Democratic coalition rather than between Democrats and Republicans, it is not surprising that such struggles were most visible at the only time the national party could be said to exist: the quadrennial nominating conventions.[80] Given the growing importance of the president in setting the national political agenda, shaping the public perception of the party, and defining the meaning of the party's identity and ideology, the selection of presidential nominees – always the focus of America's national parties – had, by the early postwar years, only grown in significance. For these reasons the institutions and rules structuring the party's selection of a nominee had come to be objects of political contestation in their own right.

Underlying these rules was the controversial question concerning the authority of the national party, as embodied by the convention, over state party affiliates. Minneapolis mayor Hubert Humphrey had drawn the conclusion that the party's federal structure had become a stumbling block for the civil rights agenda when he addressed the 1948 Democratic national convention, declaring "the time has arrived for the Democratic party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights."[81] Humphrey's impassioned intervention led to the adoption of a strongly worded civil rights plank in the party platform, triggering a walkout of the Mississippi and South Carolina delegations and the formation of the States' Rights (or Dixiecrat)

---

[80] Republicans had their own intraparty factional feuds, with anti-New Deal Taft Republicans losing out to the moderate Republicanism of Dwight Eisenhower following the former's death in 1953 and the latter's capture of presidency. For an enlightening comparison between Democratic and Republican intraparty struggles in the postwar period see Sam Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo: Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014). On party factions in American politics generally, see Daniel DiSalvo, *Engines of Change: Party Factions in American Politics, 1868-2010* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[81] Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey*, 17.

Party. But rather than effecting the realignment labor-liberals like Humphrey and Kroll had hoped for, the Dixiecrat revolt demonstrated the incapacity of the national party to exercise its supreme authority over its state affiliates, even when they openly defied the national platform and attempted to sabotage the election of its presidential nominee.

While the Dixiecrat revolt began with a southern walkout from the 1948 convention over the platform, more was at stake than just words. As V.O. Key noted at the time, "a basic doctrine of the Dixiecrat rebellion was that the Democratic party of each state was an independent entity, not bound by the actions of the national convention."[82] In fact, the Dixiecrat revolt was the climax of a process years in the making. As the meeting place of state parties, national party conventions had witnessed increasing tensions over questions of intraparty power since the beginning of the New Deal. As we have seen, the first bellwether event had been in 1936 when the convention delegates voted to abolish the two-thirds supermajority rule governing presidential nominations. President Roosevelt had also made efforts to integrate African Americans into the party apparatus.

The greatest challenge, however, came from black activists themselves in the aftermath of the 1944 Supreme Court decision in *Smith v. Allwright*, outlawing the white primary, "Dixie's most powerful legal tool of suffrage restriction."[83] In 1944, African Americans in South Carolina launched the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) to mount a credentials challenge against South Carolina's regular state delegation during Franklin Roosevelt's fourth nomination proceedings. The creation of a black political party in the midst of the Jim Crow South was, in the words of political scientist Robert Mickey, "a

---

[82] Key, *Southern Politics*, 394.
[83] Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 96. See also, Key, *Southern Politics*, chapters 19 and 29. *Smith v. Allwright* was the culmination of a succession of cases brought against the state of Texas by the NAACP.

remarkable, unprecedented development in the twentieth century."[84] Under the leadership of John Henry McCray, editor of South Carolina's foremost black newspaper, the PDP pointed to the Supreme Court's recent *Smith v. Allwright* decision and claimed to be the sole legitimate representative of South Carolina at the party's national convention. The DNC, already overburdened with the controversial replacement of Roosevelt's running mate Henry Wallace with Harry Truman, greeted the credentials challenge against South Carolina with irritation. Conjuring up the potential electoral costs of disunity in the party, DNC vice chair Oscar Ewing warned McCray that the PDP's challenge, if brought to the convention floor, would harm Roosevelt's chances for a fourth term and hobble the cause of civil rights. DNC chair Robert Hannegan also intervened, placating PDP activists by dangling the carrot that if a floor fight could be avoided the Justice Department would put its weight behind racial integration in the party. The Credentials Committee, composed of two delegates from each state party and thus over-representing the power of the South, voted against the challenge. Acceding to the national party leaders, the PDP leadership did not press for a floor fight.[85]

In 1947, confrontations with the doctrine of states' rights continued after Roosevelt's death when President Harry Truman outlined his view of the government as an instrument for advancing civil rights: "The extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people *against* the Government, but protection of the people *by* the Government. We must make the Federal Government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and equality of all Americans."[86] Truman's rhetoric on civil rights had several

---

[84] Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 107. See also, Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 170.

[85] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 42-6.

[86] Harry Truman, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 171.

motivations. On the one hand, former vice president Henry Wallace's third-party challenge sought to outflank the Democrats on the left. Bold action on civil rights could deprive Wallace's Progressive Party of some of its political oxygen. On the other hand, Truman was motivated by the belief that the South had nowhere else to turn. Such a perspective had been advanced by his aides Clark Clifford and James Rowe, who wrote in a lengthy election strategy memo that "it is inconceivable that any policy initiated by the Truman administration no matter how 'liberal' could so alienate the South in the next year that it would revolt. As always, the South can be considered safely Democratic. And in formulating national policy, it can safely be ignored."[87]

At the 1948 Democratic convention, the South Carolina PDP again sent a rival delegation, which framed its appeal to the Credentials Committee using the wartime language of democratic rights, comparing the racially exclusive practices of their rivals with the totalitarian regimes of the Axis powers. Unlike their segregationist counterparts, the PDP had held party conventions at the precinct, county, and state levels, "open to all races, and all people."[88] Conscious of the growing attention paid to black ballots by the national party, the Progressive Democrats held out the promise of wedding the loyalty of African Americans to the Democratic presidential ticket, precisely at the time when the nascent states' rights movement was publicly foreswearing their support for President Truman. In a letter sent to the Democratic National Committee chair, McCray asked, "Are we … to believe that the party of our choice was only kidding about a square deal for every human being everywhere? Are we not to be told that our party would prefer to boot lick at the toes of whose who deliver to it hefty kicks, turning its backs upon those

---

[87] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 68. Clifford's famous strategy memo, "The Politics of 1948," is available at www.trumanlibrary.org.
[88] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 125.

who do everything possible for its success?"[89] McCray warned the DNC chair that "if the Democratic party does not want the votes of Negroes … it can say so and have its wishes on the record."[90] Governor Strom Thurmond, soon-to-be leader of the Dixiecrat revolt, headed the regular South Carolina delegation in the credentials contest, seeking to discredit the PDP before the Credentials Committee by undermining the technicalities of the their formal procedures and organization. When Thurmond's colleague tried to disqualify the black party because it had not held open meetings in all state precincts, McCray responded that "if the Senator read his own hometown [news]papers, he would find … that some 200 clubs or more of your own Party didn't have any meetings at all."[91] As in 1944, the Credentials Committee ruled against the PDP. This time, however, the plaintiffs filed a minority report challenging the Credentials Committee decision. But when it arrived for discussion on the convention floor it was drowned out by southern protests.

Southern Democrats, feeling increasingly under threat by the national party leadership, had anticipated a showdown at the 1948 Democratic convention and planned accordingly. Throughout the spring, southern state Democratic conventions had registered their dissatisfaction with Truman's civil rights actions loudly and clearly, passing resolutions affirming racial segregation and vowing to defect from any national party that would nominate Truman for president. At a large gathering of southern Democrats in Birmingham, Alabama, Thurmond vowed to "preserve our civilization in the South," proclaiming that "not all the laws of Washington, or all the bayonets of the Army, can force the Negro into our homes, our churches, and our schools, or into our

---

[89] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 112.
[90] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 112.
[91] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 127.

places of recreation and amusement."[92] The attendees passed a resolution that if Truman were nominated at the national convention that summer, they would hold their own rump convention in defiance. As Clark Clifford, Truman's reelection strategist, later reflected, "we badly underestimated the reaction of the South to the civil rights message."[93]

As we have seen, in normal political times party platforms are devices constructed to placate diverse party stakeholders with vaguely worded affirmations of principle that amount to little more than campaign rhetoric. But as Jo Freeman has pointed out, under heightened political tension platforms act "as a window through which to view factional fights and a means to assess relative strength" inside a party.[94] The 1948 Democratic national convention appeared to many participants and observers as a crossroads in the struggle to shape the identity of the party. Would the Democrats continue, as Hubert Humphrey put it, to live in the shadow of states' rights or would it embrace the cause of civil rights for African Americans?

Inside the convention's preliminary Platform Committee hearings, members of the liberal advocacy organization Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) introduced a plank drafted by CIO secretary treasurer James Carey, the main proposals of which committed the party to "continuing its efforts to eradicate all racial, religious, and economic discrimination," while asserting the universal "right to live … to work … [and] to vote." It also called upon Congress to support President Truman in "guaranteeing" the fundamental rights of "full and equal political participation," "equal opportunity of

---

[92] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 189.
[93] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 190.
[94] Jo Freeman, "Feminism vs. Family Values: Women at the 1992 Democratic and Republican Conventions," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26 (1993), 26.

employment," personal security, and equality in national defense.[95] The White House however, initially so confident that southern interests could be safely ignored, balked due to fear of a costly southern defection in the general election. At Truman's direction, Clifford sought out a middle ground compromise, offering equivocal language that affirmed "the Federal Government will exercise its full constitutional power to assure that due process, the right to vote, the right to live and the right to work shall not turn on any consideration of race, religion, color or national origin."[96] However, even this tepid version was rejected by the southern contingent on the Platform Committee, who offered their own alternative stating that the federal government "shall not encroach upon the reserved powers of the states by centralization of the government or otherwise." After ten hours of continuous debate, the Committee produced a party platform in conformity with the White House draft, calling upon Congress "to exercise full authority to the limits of its constitutional power to protect these rights," but no more.[97]

Defeated in the Platform Committee, where states had equal representation, labor-liberals turned their strategy to the convention floor where, due to preponderance of non-southern delegates, the CIO-ADA civil rights plank faced better odds at adoption. With the support of a small liberal contingent on the Platform Committee, a minority report containing the CIO-ADA plank was sent to the floor. After Humphrey's barn-burning speech swung the convention in its favor, delegates from South Carolina and Mississippi walked out of the convention and launched the States' Rights Democratic Party with

[95] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 264, n. 57.
[96] Steven M. Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 48.
[97] See Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 48.

South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond and Mississippi governor Fielding Wright as a rival presidential ticket.

The Democrats' civil rights plank represented a symbolic commitment far exceeding anything from either party in the decades since Reconstruction. For labor-liberals, the potential to permanently realign the party and its policy agenda seemed to be at hand. Jack Kroll, director of the CIO's political action committee, greeted the southern bolt from the convention with great fanfare, saying the Democratic platform

> will go a long way to separate the sheep from the goats. … I think that the basis may have been laid for transforming the Democratic party as a whole into a genuine instrument for expressing the will of the vast majority of the people, unencumbered by civil war hangovers, unburdened by the magnolia and mint julep mentality, unhampered by sectional prejudices.[98]

The 1948 election results seemed to confirm this optimism further still. Upon hearing of his upset victory over his Republican challenger, President Truman proclaimed that "labor did it."[99] However, black voters, who had cast 69 percent of their ballots for the president, made Truman's slim victory in Ohio, California, and Illinois possible. The Dixiecrats, on the other hand, had failed in their immediate aim of denying any major candidate a majority of the Electoral College, thus throwing the decision to the House of Representatives where southern congressmen could exert greater leverage over the nominees. In fact, Thurmond only carried the four southern states where the States' Rights Party had managed to colonize the state Democratic Party, placing his name on the ballot in place of Truman's. In all instances where both appeared – that is, where the

---

[98] Jack Kroll, quoted in Christopher A. Baylor, "First to the Party: The Group Origins of the Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940-1960," *Studies in American Political Development* 27 (2013), 128.
[99] Quoted in Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*, 85.

Dixiecrats actually constituted a genuine third party force – Democratic loyalty carried the day.[100]

But labor-liberals who saw their political strategy of realignment at work in the 1948 election results were soon disappointed. While Truman temporarily withheld patronage from a few southern congressmen and dismissed several renegades from the Democratic National Committee for their support of the Dixiecrats, intraparty reprisals for defection were tame and eventually abandoned.[101] The DNC instituted a loyalty oath for all delegates at the 1952 convention, pledging the state delegations to support the national party's nominee. When this triggered conflict on the convention floor as Louisiana, South Carolina, and Virginia refused to make the formal pledge, the powerful Illinois delegation, hesitant to damage governor Adlai Stevenson's presidential prospects, successfully modified the resolution to free delegates from pledges that conflicted with their state laws or party rules. By the 1956 convention the loyalty oath was dropped all together.[102]

Instead of responding to the Dixiecrat rebellion with the stick, the national party leadership chose the carrot in its relations with the prickly southern wing. This meant navigating a cautious retreat on civil rights. As the party's presidential nominee in both 1952 and 1956, Stevenson quickly sought détente with the southern rebels and placated the region as a whole. He publicly distanced himself from the loyalty pledge, saying that "it isn't in the nature of a party structure that covers a nation to have total discipline and

---

[100] Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 210.
[101] See Sean J. Savage, "To Purge or Not to Purge: Hamlet Harry and the Dixiecrats, 1948-1952," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27 (1997).
[102] See Abraham Holtzman, "Party Responsibility and Loyalty: New Rules in the Democratic Party," *The Journal of Politics* 22 (1960).

total conformity of views."[103] Stevenson also chose Alabama senator John Sparkman, a supporter of the Dixiecrats and author of the subsequent convention's watered down civil rights platform plank, as his running mate in 1952.

The titular party leader's approach to reunifying the party through appeasement of the southern party-states was complemented by the party's congressional leadership, which fell to Texans Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson during the 1950s. Taking advantage of the attacks of the Taft wing of the GOP on the "me-too" moderate Republicanism of the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration, the Rayburn-Johnson leadership sought to co-opt the popularity of the president, throwing their weight behind his agenda and marginalizing those Johnson called the "bomb-throwing liberals" in Congress.[104]

It is tempting, as many historians and political scientists have done, to read the present back into the history of the Dixiecrat rebellion and portray its failed third party attempt as an early antecedent of George Wallace's racial populism of the 1960s and the eventual partisan realignment of the southern states into the Republican column.[105] But this tendency, while insightful, too often fails to see that the Dixiecrat movement, as a rebellion carried out in the name of states' rights against national party authority, was in its proximate goals quite successful.[106] Rather than portending the growth of national party power, the Dixiecrat revolt is a clear indication that the distribution of party power ran the other way, and offers a dramatic illustration of party discipline being applied to the *national* party by defiant state parties. While the Dixiecrats did not ruin Truman's

---

[103] Herbert S. Parmet, *The Democrats: The Years After FDR* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 133.
[104] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, chapter 3; Caro, *Master of the Senate*.
[105] See, for example, Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*.
[106] Robert A. Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 316.

election in 1948 as they had intended, they sent a clear message to the national leadership of the attendant risks in aggressively pursuing civil rights. The power of states' rights within the national party organization therefore limited the extent of New Deal liberalism by foreclosing the possibility of imposing the party's national agenda on its state level affiliates. While Hubert Humphrey's biographer may rightly claim that his speech at the 1948 Democratic convention "nailed civil rights to the masthead of the Democratic party," it was the forces steering the ship that mattered more than its words.[107]

Conclusion

The nature of labor-liberals' incorporation into the Democratic Party structure would come to have significant influence on both their orientation to the politics of the late 1960s and the post-1968 demands to democratize the party. On the one hand, President Lyndon Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War in 1965 drove a wedge through liberal-labor circles. Liberal doves, who became increasingly skeptical of the war and came to favor negotiated withdrawal, were conflicted over publicly confronting a Democratic president who was also pressing forward the most liberal domestic agenda since Franklin Roosevelt. Top union officials, when they were not committed anticommunists, balked at voicing their opposition to the war for fear of jeopardizing their access to the president, on whom they were reliant for policy influence. This put most labor-liberals on the Johnson administration's side as its foreign policy became the target of New Left criticism.

On the other hand, labor's insertion into a system of elite brokerage over presidential nominees placed a valuable source of its political power in the "smoke-filled

---

[107] Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey*, 19.

backrooms" the New Politics movement would seek to dismantle. While this promised to disrupt the principal channel of labor's policy influence, it created greater uncertainty over labor's future role in party politics. Labor's historical shortcomings as a politically engaged rank-and-file movement posed daunting limitations on how effectively it would be able to adapt to more participatory party organs. As we will see, the ability to engage union membership as convention delegates was not distributed equally within the trade union movement, and democratizing the Democratic Party offered to shift the balance of forces inside the national union hierarchy.

Additionally, the New Deal regime eventually had detrimental effects on the organizational capacity of the Democratic Party to serve as a competitive electoral vehicle. As mentioned in Chapter 1, postwar Democratic presidents, especially Lyndon Johnson, took for granted the durability of partisan majorities in Congress and in the electorate, and tended to see policy victories instead of investments in organization building as the primary means of attracting votes. While national leadership on party building was sorely lacking, its costs were temporarily compensated by the efforts of the labor movement in the large industrial states. But reliance on state Democratic parties and labor to get out the vote on election day had its limits, which began to be felt by the mid-1960s. In 1966, California's representative on the DNC raised concerns by describing the national committee as "basically a shell," and further warned that unless trends were reversed "there may be a general disintegration of Democratic Party organization throughout the country."[108] In advance of Johnson's own reelection bid in 1968, his party liaison Lawrence O'Brien informed the White House:

---

[108] DNC member, quoted in David Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal in the United States: 1968-1972," *Studies in American Political Development* 10 (1996), 239.

Nationally, the Democratic Party faces serious organizational problems. Many of the state organizations are flabby and wedded to techniques which are conventional and outmoded. …The Democratic National Committee is not staffed or equipped to conduct a successful Presidential election. The Democratic Party, to a greater or lesser extent, has lost contact with the voters.[109]

As we will see, the consequences of failing to heed these warnings would become acutely felt in 1968, when the party's loss of the presidential contest granted additional legitimacy to the reform movement. At that moment the crisis of American liberalism became intertwined with the party's organizational crisis, opening a window of opportunity for the reform movement, but also posing serious obstacles to its intention of transforming the Democratic Party.

---

[109] Lawrence O'Brien, quoted in Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 193-4.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARD A MORE RESPONSIBLE PARTY?
DEMOCRATIC PARTY FEDERALISM AND CIVIL RIGHTS
IN THE 1950s AND 1960s

The previous chapter has shown that the New Deal Democratic Party, while dedicated to increasing the power of the central state and using that power in the name of universal rights, was still structurally a party of states' rights. State parties were autonomous participants in a national federation whose reason for being was to coordinate their activity around an agreeable presidential candidate and support his campaign in the general election. This form of organization was no mere relic of the past. Rather, Democratic Party federalism was itself an essential mechanism in the reproduction of the contradictory coalition undergirding the New Deal regime. State parties could defy the will of the convention or the national leadership with relative impunity, placing continual pressure on the Democratic leadership to placate the diverse interests underpinning the party coalition. As I have argued, the party leadership's response to the Dixiecrat revolt of 1948 exemplified the capacity of the state parties to discipline the national party and curtail the policy agenda of Democratic leaders, especially regarding the pursuit of African Americans' civil rights.

It was this decentralized national party structure, and the power it gave to state party leaders, that reform activists confronted and aimed to transform in the late 1960s. Their demand for meaningful access and programmatic, issue-driven politics was a response to this structure and the perceived injustice of a nationally liberal party tolerating the participation of white supremacists within its party councils. As would be heard in the New Politics reform proposals that followed in the wake of the 1968 party

crisis, such a "glaring discrepancy" between "stated ideals" and practices was denounced as "immoral" and countered with the proposal that the national party be equipped to discipline state affiliates or party members that failed to conform to the party's basic principles, even by sponsoring the creation of rival Democratic organizations.[1] Thus, from its inception, one of the essential components of the New Politics movement was establishing the supremacy of the national party and terminating the institutional legacy of states' rights.

This chapter will profile two critical moments in the development of the New Politics movement following the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt. I will argue that these confrontations with party federalism revealed that the intraparty forces favoring racial equality could not become predominant without substantially rebalancing power relations within the party. As I have already argued, this period saw a cautious retreat on the politics of civil rights by the pragmatic leadership of the Democratic Party. The Dixiecrats' act of defiance reinforced the moderating inclinations of national leaders such as two-time presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson over the course of the 1950s, even as Washington liberals in the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), as well as many southern racial justice activists, made concerted efforts to shift the struggle for civil rights on to the terrain of party organization. These precedents, while all unsuccessful in their immediate aims, paved the way for the reforms advanced by the New Politics movement in the aftermath of the 1968 party crisis. These battles continued to weigh on the minds of reformers as they drew up their agenda in the post-1968 period. Efforts to develop

---

[1] See the testimony of the New Democratic Coalition (NDC) to the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, Box 12, Folder: Washington, DC 4/25/69, DNC Records, National Archives, Washington, DC. For more on the NDC, see chapter 5 below.

policymaking capability within the Democratic National Committee (DNC) during the 1950s were a response to the perceived defects of party structure that the post-1972 struggle over the party charter would later take up. The credentials challenges posed by black Mississippi Freedom activists against the state's all-white delegation at the 1964 Democratic national convention, which recognized "the right of political participation for all," would provide the wedge with which reform activists would later pry open the party. Indeed, as *The Nation* observed, by 1968 "the Southern black strategy of challenging racist and restrictive Democratic Party processes had become a national strategy for reform."[2]

The Democratic Advisory Council and the "New Politics" of Principle

The first major effort to mount an organizational response to party federalism was overseen by an unlikely agent in the second half of the 1950s: the chair of the Democratic National Committee, Paul Butler. As former chair of the Indiana state Democratic Party, Butler rose to the head of the DNC with a reputation as an able "organization man," securing the support of southern committee members by pledging that he did "not consider the question of segregation a political issue" and saw "no reason for any chairman at any level to project segregation into our political discussions."[3] However, once installed, Butler made an about-face and pursued a range of bold party reform initiatives. His reform initiatives were shaped in response to two important developments affecting the Democratic Party at that moment. On the one hand, the political context and

---

[2] Howard Romaine, "Why a Black Man Should Run," *The Nation*, 27 September 1971, quoted in Stephen C. Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces for Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 57.

[3] Butler, quoted in Sam Hoffman Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo: Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System," (Ph.D diss., Harvard University, 2014), 61-2.

public opinion had shifted considerably on racial politics during the first half of the decade, providing racial justice advocates both inside and outside the party with greater leverage to press for meaningful civil rights legislation. This was mostly the result of the success of civil rights organizing and agitation over the intervening years, as well as the gradual but decisive alliance of the federal government with forces within the black freedom movement, represented most dramatically in the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of the Supreme Court in 1954. On the other hand, Democratic Party leaders such as Butler were confronted with the paradox of large defeats in presidential elections alongside increasing liberal Democratic majorities in Congress. In this context liberals inside and outside public office fashioned a discourse that emphasized the success of issue-oriented partisan opposition and placed blame for Democratic losses at the presidential level on conservative southern Democrats, the institutional advantages they exploited in Congress, and their détente with pragmatic party moderates.[4]

As we have seen, the Dixiecrat revolt had exerted a chilling effect on the political agenda of the Democratic Party, especially regarding its pursuit of civil rights. For all that the platform battle in 1948 signified about the orientation of postwar liberalism toward explicitly embracing racial justice, its aftermath revealed the weakness of the party's liberal forces to advance their agenda over the resistance of the South and the objections of moderates who feared the electoral and legislative consequences of intraparty division and conflict. Indeed, President Harry Truman's executive orders desegregating the army

---

[4] On Paul Butler and his tenure as chair of the DNC, see Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," chapter 2; Herbert S. Parmet, *The Democrats: The Years After FDR* (New York: Macmillan), chapters 7-8; and Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), chapter 2. On the development of liberal discourse in this period, see Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and its Consequences, 1948-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42-6.

and barring discrimination in federal employment proved to be the last gasps rather than the opening salvos of a renewed push for labor-liberalism and racial justice. Legislative obstruction by the coalition of southern Democrats and Republicans in Congress tightened, choking off nearly all of the president's 21-point Fair Deal proposals. The wider political climate of anticommunism also diminished liberals in the public sphere, marginalizing them within the Democratic Party as its leaders sought to dodge accusations of communist sympathies that their opponents could exploit in the next election.

Through the 1950s, liberal Democrats argued that the party's indecisive action on civil rights was costing them at the polls. The preexisting congressional obstacles and, by 1953, the loss of the White House deprived liberal Democrats and activists of the national channels through which they had mobilized for government action in the past. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's own brand of moderate Republicanism left the door open to courting black votes. With Truman's retirement, the Democratic leadership passed to Adlai Stevenson who, despite his willingness to press liberal issues as governor of Illinois, walked a cautious route on race in his successive presidential bids, hoping to reunite the disaffected South with northern liberals. Eisenhower had already carried the majority vote of African Americans in a host of large cities in 1952, and in 1956 Harlem representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. bolted to the Republican president in protest of Democratic indecision on civil rights. That same year Attorney General Herbert Brownell pushed for a civil rights bill to be introduced in Congress, hoping to exacerbate the split inside the Democratic Party and take the credit for civil rights action, especially if southern Democrats blocked its passage. Democratic leaders in Congress, such as Senate

Majority Leader Johnson and Speaker of the House Rayburn, sometimes indicated they favored such a bill as well, if only to mitigate the loss of civil rights supporters to the GOP and establish liberal credentials for Johnson's own presidential ambitions.[5]

With the Democrats out of power in the executive branch and an accommodationist congressional leadership, labor-liberals intertwined their policy agenda with demands for party reform, specifically regarding the location of policymaking leadership in the absence of a sitting Democratic president. While Stevenson himself had the reputation of a brainy, rather aloof party leader, the same was not true of the liberals drawn to his candidacy. In fact, it was in response to his relatively detached leadership style in the wake of his first electoral defeat that a correspondence committee developed among Stevenson supporters, linking together a network of liberal intellectuals and Democratic officeholders with a desire to promote a powerful liberal agenda in the party. The group's membership overlapped with those Arthur Schlesinger famously described as "vital center" liberals of the ADA, and included newly elected officials of the House and Senate such as Eugene McCarthy and Hubert Humphrey, journalist Norman Cousins, and political scientists E.E. Schattschneider and James MacGregor Burns. [6] Schattschneider himself had recently chaired a famous study undertaken by the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1950, which had lamented the non-programmatic, decentralized structure of the American party system and proposed as an alternative the development of what its authors called "responsible party government"

[5] Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 32-3; Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 49; Robert Caro, *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson III* (New York: Vintage, 2002).
[6] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).

through articulating policy positions, enforcing intraparty discipline, and centralizing power at the national level.[7]

The Stevenson group found a key ally in Butler, who had been elected chair of the DNC in December 1954, and soon took up with increasing urgency the need for a strong, ideologically coherent Democratic Party, which could offer distinct policy alternatives to Republicans. For Butler and other liberal reformers, the problem was that the national Democratic Party was not liberal enough to distinguish itself adequately from Eisenhower's moderate Republicanism. Having been quite taken with the analysis and recommendations laid out in the APSA's 1950 report on responsible parties, Butler argued that if the Democrats wanted to retake the White House, they would have to engage in institutional reform both inside the party as well as in Congress.[8] In his public statements the DNC chair criticized the "loose organization in the relationship of the state group to the national level," the "loosely organized national conventions and national committees," as well as "the lack of mechanics to provide statements of official policy." Butler reserved his major criticism, however, for the "total lack of disciplinary authority in implementing the provisions of the party platform."[9]

The outcome of the 1956 elections hardened liberals' resolve and emboldened Butler's leadership on the party reform issue. Stevenson's second failure to capture the presidency was offset by increasing numbers of liberal Democrats in Congress, whose ranks increased yet again in the 1958 midterms. However, despite these gains, legislative

---

[7] American Political Science Association, *Towards a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee on Political Parties* (New York: Rinehart, 1950). For discussion see, Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), chapter 2; Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 41-2; and Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," chapters 1-2.

[8] See Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), chapter 5; and Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," chapter 4.

[9] Paul Butler, quoted in Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," 76.

agenda-setting power remained concentrated in the hands of conservative southern committee chairs and the pragmatic leadership of Rayburn and Johnson. To counter this, Butler proposed the creation of an alternative policymaking body within the DNC, the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC), composed of liberal members of Congress as well as Democratic mayors and governors, public intellectuals, and honorary party figureheads such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman. Its function would be "to coordinate and advance" coherent and compelling policy proposals according to what Butler called "Democratic principles."[10] Such a body inside the party would serve to keep the Democrats apace with what he called the "new politics," which were "increasing the emphasis on the power of issues, principles, and ideas" in American public life. "Party leaders are fast discovering," Butler argued, "that political organizations based solely on patronage, personal favors, and the power and prestige of public office no longer enjoy the tremendous effectiveness they once possessed."[11] In addition to the DAC, Butler outlined a plan to make party platform development as open and participatory a process as possible, tapping the director of the party's youth organization and the party's publicity director to organize platform meetings in ten cities, each dedicated to a different policy issue, and convening in a midterm policy platform conference, a proposal borrowed directly from the APSA report.

Proposing to relocate agenda-setting power to an issue-oriented party council met with fierce criticism and opposition from congressional leaders Rayburn and Johnson, who had premised their legislative strategy on minimizing intraparty divisions and supporting the initiatives of the enormously popular President Eisenhower. Such

---

[10] Butler, quoted in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 22.
[11] Butler, quoted in Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," 63.

bipartisanship necessitated pursuing racial equality at a glacial pace – precisely the approach Butler and others diagnosed as the main obstacle to the Democrats retaking the White House.[12] However, Rayburn and Johnson's objections reflected more than just guarded defense of their privileges. Indeed, Johnson and Rayburn opposed Butler's vision of political parties as principled agents of social change. For Johnson, "the biggest danger to American stability is the politics of principle, which brings out the masses in irrational fights for unlimited goals."[13] He attacked the DAC as "open[ing] up a real hornet's nest" because it was "completely powerless to produce any votes" in Congress and was only capable of "deepening divisions in the Democratic Party."[14] From the perspective of the party's legislative leaders, any policymaking body outside the House or Senate could have no practical understanding of the actual mechanics of lawmaking – brokering, deal making, compromising – and could only have counterproductive effects on the party and its success.

That such wrangling over policy and party organization had at its core the issue of civil rights was clarified once the DAC was established and started issuing policy statements in defiance of the vocal intraparty opposition. (The DAC had a budget independent of the DNC, financed by liberal party patrons, limiting the extent to which party regulars or conservatives on the national committee could discontinue its activities.) Statements that criticized Eisenhower on foreign policy from the right, typically authored

---

[12] The apparent exception was the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the first of its kind passed since Reconstruction. However, as Lyndon Johnson's biographer makes clear, the Act's passage was the result of Johnson's presidential ambitions for 1960, and he stripped it of all enforcement mechanisms to retain the support of the southern bloc. See Caro, *Master of the Senate*.

[13] Johnson, quoted in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 24. See also, Robert Caro, *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson IV* (New York: Vintage, 2012), xviii, where he sums up the modus operandi of Johnson's pre-presidential political career with the quote, "It's not the job of a politician to go around saying principled things."

[14] Johnson, quoted in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 23.

by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, generally went over smoothly with southern state party officials and congressional Democrats. However, statements concerning domestic policy were often to the left of the 1956 Democratic platform and drew recrimination and retribution from southern conservatives. During the crisis at Little Rock Central High School in September 1957, the DAC issued a statement deriding Arkansas's Democratic governor Orval Faubus's decision to defy the Supreme Court's desegregation order in its 1954 *Brown* decision. "It need hardly be said," the DAC statement read, "that the action of Governor Faubus does not represent the position or the policy of the Democratic Party."[15] The statement received front-page coverage in the *New York Times*. In protest, Louisiana's Democratic state committee recalled their DNC representative who sat on the DAC, even though he often vocally dissented with the council's policy statements concerning civil rights. Publicly, Rayburn distanced himself from Butler, while in private he was more aggressive, recommending to one party donor that he temporarily withhold any contributions to the DNC to avoid any "endorsement of [Butler's] criticism of Congress."[16]

The DAC continued to hammer away at the party's civil rights moderation through public statements and policy proposals until the 1960 presidential race assumed overpowering attention. Though these policy alternatives did not gain traction as legislative initiatives in Congress due to the intractable opposition of Democratic leaders, the DAC represented a significant force in shifting the dynamic of intraparty conflict over racial equality onto the terrain of party organization. After John Bailey replaced Butler as DNC chair when John F. Kennedy won the party's presidential nomination, the DAC was

---

[15] DAC press release, quoted in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 35.
[16] Rayburn, quoted in Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo," 94.

discontinued. Butler's creative approach to institutional power in the party did not succeed in its ambition to build a responsible, programmatically liberal party in the 1950s. But, as we will see, the intertwining of liberalism and party reform had only been temporarily defeated.

States' Rights or Civil Rights? Mississippi Freedom in Atlantic City

The second major effort to challenge Democratic Party federalism came not from elite politics in Washington, DC, but from the grassroots politics of the southern civil rights movement. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) mounted a formidable challenge in the midst of the 1964 Democratic national convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, seeking to unseat the regular, all-white Mississippi state delegation on the grounds of the state party's racially discriminatory practices. The MFDP had emerged from the creative tactics in use by the southern civil rights movement. During the previous summer of 1963, an array of civil rights groups, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), had joined forces in Mississippi under the umbrella of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in a project called Freedom Vote. While these organizations, especially SNCC, had been engaged in painstaking grassroots voter registration for several years, the gradualism inherent in such a strategy had been met with overwhelming obstruction and violent resistance at the hands of both public officials as well as private vigilante defenders of segregation and disfranchisement. Rather than risk trying to cast a ballot in a Mississippi county courthouse, the Freedom Voters held a

statewide mock election, not only to offer black voters a greater modicum of physical safety by placing polling stations inside grocery stores, churches, and beauty parlors, but also to provide irrefutable evidence to national Democratic Party leaders that southern blacks were eager to exercise their right to vote, if only they were permitted.

By launching their own racially integrated, rival party organization, the MFDP challenged the Democratic national convention to employ its power as the supreme party authority to recognize the legitimacy of their cause and grant them the credentials to represent the state of Mississippi at the Atlantic City convention. Even though this immediate goal was not achieved in the compromise that eventually ended the dispute, the antidiscrimination clause approved by the convention to be included in the official Call to the 1968 convention four years later would have massive ramifications for the course of party reform.

While the MFDP's credentials challenge at the 1964 convention marked an especially important turning point in the course of party reform and the black freedom movement, the action was not totally unprecedented. As we have seen in Chapter 2, there had been several sporadic attempts that employed similar tactics and strategy as those of the MFDP at past Democratic national conventions. But credentials challenges by rival party organizations had subsided as the national party distanced itself from civil rights throughout the 1950s. By 1964, however, the context had changed dramatically, providing new leverage to black party insurgents. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s African American insurgencies had produced new organizations, such as the SCLC, SNCC, and CORE. These brought to national attention a new crop of black leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Moses, and Ella Baker, as well as new tactics, such as

sit-ins, freedom rides, and voter registration drives that sought to confront directly the power of authoritarian rule in the Jim Crow South. In 1962 the Supreme Court's *Baker v. Carr* decision reapportioned southern congressional districts according to a doctrine of one-person, one-vote, dismantling the malapportionment that had favored rural representatives over their metropolitan counterparts, further weakening conservatives' power in Congress.[17] The massive 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, organized by labor-oriented civil rights leaders Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, helped spur President John F. Kennedy to introduce a new civil rights bill into Congress.

The enactment of the Civil Rights Act in July 1964, outlawing discrimination based on race or sex, unequal voter registration requirements, and segregation in public accommodations, took place only the month before the convention in Atlantic City. As the most sweeping civil rights bill since Reconstruction, southern Democrats had resisted it bitterly, delaying the Senate for a historic eighty-three days, but eventually succumbing to a filibuster override vote engineered by the newly installed President Lyndon Johnson.

With the force of the federal government behind them, and with the foundations of southern conservatives' power shaken, civil rights and liberal activists planned a frontal assault on Jim Crow by dismantling the institutional power of white supremacy inside the national Democratic Party. By mounting a public challenge to the Democratic

---

[17] Robert Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 63, 318; Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 215. The Baker case was brought by a Republican in Tennessee on the grounds that the state had not redrawn its legislative districts since 1901. The controversial decision of the Court, which represented a major reversal of federal court tradition that viewed districting as a legislative rather than judicial question, was upheld in the 1964 Supreme Court decision of Reynolds v. Simms. Although Brown has assumed a greater historical importance in the black freedom narrative than Baker, Chief Justice Earl Warren considered the latter to have been the crowning achievement of his career. See J. Douglas Smith, *On Democracy's Doorstep: The Inside Story on How the Supreme Court Brought "One Person, One Vote" to the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2014); and Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 63.

leadership in the midst of the 1964 national convention in Atlantic City, the coalition hoped to expel the segregationist Mississippi delegation and force the party to commit to racial equality within its own organization. From their perspective, the Democratic administration's historic achievement in the pursuit of racial justice created new leverage with which a credentials challenge could goad the national convention into disciplining southern state parties that continued to exclude blacks from political life. Tolerating the participation of racially exclusive state delegations in a national party that had just embraced the cause of racial justice was an incongruity that the Freedom Democrats pressured the convention to reconcile.

The plan to bring the Mississippi Freedom movement to Atlantic City in August 1964 had developed out of the limits COFO's 1963 mock election had confronted in terms of effecting actual change in the structure of southern racial politics. Freedom Vote had convinced organizers to continue mobilizing sensational demonstrations of black citizenship across Mississippi to draw the attention of national media. Prominent ADA liberal and Democratic Party activist Allard Lowenstein, who had been instrumental in recruiting white college students from Stanford and Yale to travel to Mississippi during Freedom Vote, spearheaded such a strategy on a larger scale during the 1964 Freedom Summer project.[18] At the center of Freedom Summer was the newly created Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Animating COFO's creation of a new political party was not just the immediate goal of breaking the monopoly of white supremacists on the local Democratic party-state, but also the desire to push their grievances into the national spotlight by publicly confronting the Democratic leadership at the party's forthcoming

---

[18] William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 180-6.

national convention. Their overall strategy embraced a process that civil rights organizer Bayard Rustin later called shifting "from protest to politics." The MFDP sought to make "a conscious bid for *political power*" by moving beyond a grassroots social struggle and "translat[ing] itself into a political movement" to realign the Democratic Party.[19] Like Freedom Vote, the MFDP would demonstrate the capacity of black Mississippians to organize politically when freed from the constraints of white intimidation and electoral fraud. Unlike the mock election, however, the MFDP would take seriously its claim to represent all Mississippians at the national Democratic convention and challenge the legitimacy of the regular delegation in Atlantic City.[20]

Officially established in April 1964, the MFDP elected NAACP organizer Aaron Henry as chair of the party and sharecropper-turned-activist Fannie Lou Hamer as vice-chair. The Freedom Democrats held precinct meetings and county conventions in thirty-five of eighty-five counties, a state convention with more than 250 delegates, and elected sixty-eight delegates to represent the MFDP in Atlantic City. Ella Baker, an organizer with SNCC and the SCLC, established the party's Washington office to mobilize northern support, and Joseph Rauh, a member of ADA and legal counsel to the United Auto Workers (UAW), offered his services to lead the Freedom Democrats' challenge before the Credentials Committee. In July, a month before the convention, Mississippi Freedom delegates announced the Atlantic City challenge at a press conference outside their state convention in Jackson, where they accused the national party as having "stood

---

[19] Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," *Commentary*, February 1965. See also, John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 393-403.

[20] In addition to the sources cited below, the following account of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey is drawn from an interview conducted with Vice President Walter Mondale in Minneapolis, 1 December 2014; and the records of the Americans for Democratic Action at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

silent while the all-white delegations from the Magnolia State have come to party conventions with no thought of contributing to the solidarity of the party behind a common platform."[21]

At first glance, the Freedom Democrats appeared to have a good case against the Mississippi regulars. Not only had the press coverage of Freedom Vote and Freedom Summer brought to national attention the widespread exclusion of African Americans from political participation in the South, but the state party itself had strained relations with national party leaders. In addition to having bolted the party in protest in 1948, Mississippi Democrats had continually opposed the domestic programs of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Moreover, the Mississippi regulars continued to affirm in their party platform their commitment to "the separation of the races" as "necessary for the peace and tranquility of all the people of Mississippi."[22] Such a flagrant endorsement of racial segregation stood in such sharp contrast with the national party leadership's recent embrace of racial equality. It was inconceivable to the MFDP and many other observers that the balance of forces at Atlantic City would favor the regular segregationists.

Indeed, optimism seemed justified as messages of support began filtering in, including from nine state Democratic delegations as well as twenty-five Democratic members of Congress. These sentiments echoed the nods of support from important Democratic-oriented actors that Freedom activists had received even before officially forming the MFDP. Back in March, at the UAW's convention, Moses, Baker, and Rauh

---

[21] Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Plume, 1993), 110. It is unclear what relationship, if any, MFDP organizers and activists had to the by-then-defunct South Carolina Progressive Democratic Party, which launched similar credentials challenges in 1944 and 1948.
[22] Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 106.

had met with Mildred Jeffrey, head of the union's Community Relations department, about their plans to form a rival party organization and bring it to the upcoming Democratic convention. She and the other top UAW political operatives – Bill Dodds, Roy Reuther, and Jack Conway – agreed that the challenge was a defensible one, especially if it produced the result they expected: the seating of both delegations, triggering a walkout of the regulars. A few weeks later, ADA chair John Roche sent a letter to all state Democratic Party chairs, urging them "to select as a member of the Credentials Committee a delegate who will vote against seating the segregated Mississippi delegation," whose "ugly racism stands in sharp contrast" to the Freedom Democrats and the national Democratic Party. For Roche, the entire future of the national party was contained in embryo within the seemingly small Mississippi credentials dispute.

> Support of the Freedom Democratic Party will be consistent with the principles of the platforms adopted for many years by the Democratic National Conventions. The Democratic Party started the modern drive for equal political rights for Negroes in 1948. The seating of the Freedom Democratic Party delegation in 1964 will make the Party's position clear and will strengthen its claim to the votes of all who recognize the drive for full equality as the great moral issue facing America today.[23]

By July, with the convention scheduled for the following month, the position of the national party on the great moral issue of civil rights could not have been clearer. The final passage of the Civil Rights Act into law and the political commitment it represented was itself reflected in the 1964 party platform, written mostly by the White House, in a section dedicated to the "democracy of opportunity," mentioning the Civil Rights Act by

---

[23] Memo from National Chairman John P. Roche to State Party Chairs, 13 June 1964, Box 28, Folder: Democratic National Convention – 1964, ADA Records.

name and calling for its "full observance by every American and fair, effective enforcement." The same party platform denounced the activities of the Ku Klux Klan and pledged the Johnson administration "to continue the Nation's march towards the goals of equal opportunity and equal treatment for all Americans regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin."[24]

As their legal counsel, Rauh crafted the MFDP's challenge before the Credentials Committee in light of the specific rules governing the party convention and its committee process. The Credentials Committee was composed of two members from each state and territorial delegation, totaling 110 members. Equal representation of each state gave disproportionate influence to rural and often conservative delegates. Rauh anticipated that the MFDP, like South Carolina's Progressive Democratic Party in the 1940s, would not receive a majority vote from the Credentials Committee. However, while convention rules gave each state equal representation on the Credentials Committee, state delegations on the convention floor reflected each state's share of the Electoral College, giving greater influence to large industrial states, who were more likely supportive of African American's civil rights. According to the regulations set by the Rules Committee, if Rauh could get one-tenth of the Credentials Committee – eleven members – to vote in support of the challenge, a minority report could be sent to the convention floor, where Rauh was confident they would win in a roll call vote. "When states like New York, New Jersey,

---

[24] *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention 1964* (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1964), 57, 64. See also, Harold F. Bass, Jr., "Presidential Party Leadership and Party Reform: Lyndon B. Johnson and the MFDP Controversy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21 (1991), 88, where Beltway journalists Roland Evans and Robert Novak are quoted as saying, "Johnson himself was dictating not only broad outlines of the [1964] platform but some of the specifics as well."

California, and Illinois and many others have to put it on the line before those national television cameras," he said, "there's no doubt in my mind that they will go with us."[25]

However, while Rauh's shrewd strategy reflected a keen understanding of convention rules and norms, it also revealed the shakiness of the challenge's basis in law. After all, as we have seen, aside from state-run primary elections, which had come under federal scrutiny after the 1944 Supreme Court's *Allwright* decision outlawing the white primary, party governance was a realm of political action which parties regulated themselves. State parties determined their own rules in accordance with existing state law, if any. At the national level, the DNC simply prepared a set of "temporary rules" for convention proceedings, usually modeled off the previous convention's operations, to be ratified during the perfunctory preliminary proceedings at the start of each nominating convention. The convention, as the embodiment of the national party, was not in the business of instructing state parties how to conduct their internal affairs, nor how they should select their delegates to the national conventions. While the Credentials Committee was charged with adjudicating occasional accusations that a state's delegates were not in fact duly selected according to state law or the state party's own rules, it was not clear what should be done in cases alleging systematic racial discrimination in the delegate selection process.

In light of this legal vacuum, Rauh's strategy before the Credentials Committee drew on the contemporaneous embrace of racial justice by the national Democratic leadership, and cast the MFDP challenge as a test case of the party's moral commitment to that cause. "In the final analysis," he argued during the Credentials Committee hearing, "the issue is one of principle[:] … whether the National Democratic Party takes its place

---

[25] Rauh, quoted in Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 111.

with the oppressed Negroes of Mississippi or their white oppressors, with those loyal to

the National Democratic Party or those who have spewed hatred [toward] President

Kennedy and President Johnson." [26] In the hearings that followed, the Freedom

Democrats offered their own testimony to the Committee, including from Aaron Henry,

CORE's James Farmer, white Mississippi chaplain Edwin King, Fannie Lou Hamer, the

NAACP's Roy Wilkins, and Martin Luther King, Jr., each relying on moral suasion to

build their case. In front of the Committee and a live television audience, Hamer

delivered a moving account of the violence she experienced at the hands of police and

white vigilantes when she attempted to register to vote, while Martin Luther King

underscored the ramifications of hypocrisy for the legitimacy of the Democratic

administration should the party continue to choose what was politically expedient over

what was morally right: "Can we preach freedom and democracy in Asia, Africa, and

Latin America if we refuse to give voice and vote to the only democratically constituted

delegation from Mississippi?"[27]

Mississippi regulars countered with their own arguments on legal grounds that

painted the MFDP as a rump collection of "foreign" activists who engaged in secret

meetings that were not representative of registered voters in the state. Mississippi DNC

---

[26] Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., Brief submitted by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party for the consideration of the Credentials Subcommittee, Box 28, Folder: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1965, ADA Records. In his legal brief, Rauh argued from a precedent set at the 1944 Democratic convention, when two rival Texas delegations – one pro-Roosevelt, the other anti – had vied for recognition as the sole legitimate state Democratic Party. Roosevelt had elected to seat them both, splitting the votes between them. To Rauh's delight, Lyndon Johnson had been a delegate in the pro-Roosevelt faction. Rauh saw such a precedent as offering the seeds of a favorable compromise: if the Atlantic City convention sat both Mississippi delegations on the condition that they swear loyalty to the national party, the regulars would bolt, proving the MFDP's case. While Democratic National Chairman John Bailey and Credentials Committee Chairman David Lawrence greeted Rauh's proposal positively, the White House rejected it. See Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 117; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 124; and Michael E. Parrish, *Citizen Rauh: An American Liberal's Life in Law and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 170.

[27] Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 121. See also, Bass, "Johnson and the MFDP Controversy," 90.

committee member E.K. Collins denounced the Freedom Democrats as "power-hungry soreheads," and denied that there were any racial barriers to political participation in his state party. In addition to procedural disputes, he issued an ominous threat to the Credentials Committee that portended a southern walkout greater than that witnessed in 1948. "You will kill our party if you do not seat the lawful delegation from Mississippi," he warned.[28]

The fatal flaw in the MFDP's credentials contest strategy, however, was the assumption that President Lyndon Johnson would remain effectively neutral in the dispute. While black Mississippi activists and their liberal allies knew that the pressure to unify the party for the November elections would prevent the sitting president and titular party leader from publicly supporting such a polarizing intraparty gambit, they anticipated an official ambivalence from the White House that would provide them the space to whip together a majority of delegates on the convention floor.[29] The anticipated adoption of the Credentials Committee minority report and the seating of the MFDP, then, could be chalked up as an action taken by the supreme body of the national party, one that even the party leader in the White House would be compelled to honor. Such an assumption, however, drastically underestimated Johnson's anxiety concerning his first official presidential nomination and his grand ambition to score an FDR-sized electoral victory in November.

These concerns had played an important role in the convention planning process itself, an activity over which Johnson had "established complete control," according to

---

[28] E.K. Collins, quoted in Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie*, 294.
[29] Bass, "Johnson and the MFDP Controversy," 92-3.

one of his closest aides.[30] In fact, DNC chair John Bailey, top convention staff, and several important state party leaders had been in continuous contact with the White House since the MFDP's public announcement of the challenge in July. After a lengthy strategy session with his top personnel and allies, Johnson decided to avoid a floor fight at all costs. Texas governor John Connally warned the president that if he "let those black buggers march in … the whole South will march out." Georgia governor Carl Sanders reflected the concerns of many southern Democratic Party leaders when he told the president, "it looks like we're turning the Democratic Party over to the nigras." Johnson, seeing before him the real possibility of an avalanche, told UAW president Walter Reuther, "I am going to lose the election because of the fact that I'm going to lose the South."[31]

Raising Johnson's anxieties about his electoral prospects was the insurgent candidacy of Alabama governor George Wallace in the Democratic primary elections. Wallace, who had famously pledged to maintain "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever" in his 1963 inaugural address, had vowed to defend the Democratic Party's tradition of states' rights against the overreaching federal government.[32] That Johnson had angered his southern supporters and risked their defection by prioritizing – and indeed, expanding – Kennedy's civil rights bill was not a surprise to anyone. As Johnson himself is reported to have said to his aide Bill Moyers only hours after signing the historic 1964 Civil Rights Act: "I think we just delivered the

[30] George Reedy Oral History XXVI, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, available online at www.lbjlibrary.org.
[31] William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 314-5.
[32] On George Wallace, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

South to the Republican party for a long time to come."[33] However, more troubling than the specter of southern defection was the popularity of Wallace's message outside the South, where he scored considerable support in the Wisconsin, Indiana, and Maryland primaries. Johnson sensed he was facing insurrections on two fronts. While publicly he remained impassive, the president privately commissioned a confidential poll which confirmed that "*backlash* was a *potential* threat, [though] not yet a *real* threat."[34] And while Wallace withdrew his name from the Democratic race after Republicans nominated the conservative Arizona senator Barry Goldwater, Johnson prioritized preventing the potential backlash from become real.

But if Johnson felt pressure to placate the South and other conservatives from the right, he also faced pressure to live up to the moral and political commitments that those on his left felt were inherent in the Civil Rights Act. In the less than twelve months since being sworn in following the assassination of President Kennedy, LBJ, considered by many liberals to be a typical southern Democrat, had moved quickly to win over liberal skeptics and Kennedy loyalists by embracing his fallen predecessor's stalled legislative agenda. As he told Kennedy's chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, Walter Heller, only days after assuming office:

> Now I want to say something about all this talk that I'm a conservative who is likely to go back to the Eisenhower ways. … It's not so, and I want you to tell your friends – Arthur Schlesinger, [John Kenneth] Galbraith, and other liberals – that it is not so. … I am a Roosevelt New Dealer. As a matter of fact, to tell the truth, John F. Kennedy was a little too conservative to suit my taste.[35]

---

[33] Johnson, quoted in Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 325.
[34] Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1964* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1965), 308.
[35] Johnson, quoted in Caro, *The Passage of Power*, 397.

Strong as they were, Johnson's actions spoke louder than his words. His willingness to wait-out the southern filibuster, the historic stumbling block of civil rights legislation, won him the respect of even his most acerbic liberal critics. However, as the Democratic convention approached, the *New York Times* editorialized that unless the president worked out a settlement that recognized the legitimacy of the MFDP's complaints, "he will stand open to the charge that he chose silence in order to compete more effectively with the Republican opponent for Southern white racist votes."[36] With his Republican challenger artfully exploiting the feelings of betrayal throughout the South and Democratic Party liberals throwing their support behind the Mississippi challenge, Johnson and his aides were stuck on the horns of a dilemma.

The president used all the resources at his disposal to chart a middle course and resolve the Mississippi challenge off the convention floor and away from the public eye. He instructed the FBI to wiretap the phones of the MFDP's Atlantic City office and the phones of its principal supporters, including the hotel rooms of Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King. He reached out to the governor of Mississippi personally, assuring him that the MFDP would not be seated. After rejecting a proposal that would have recognized and seated both Mississippi delegations, Johnson assigned vice-presidential hopeful Hubert Humphrey and UAW president Walter Reuther to defuse the situation, saying to the latter, "if you and Hubert Humphrey have got any leadership, you'd get Joe Rauh off that damn television."[37] As the Senate floor manager who overcame the filibuster of the Civil Rights Act barely two months before and the liberal firebrand who had pressed the civil rights plank on the southern wing in 1948, Humphrey had impressive credentials as

---

[36] "Mississippi's Delegates," *New York Times*, 19 August 1964," quoted in Bass, "Johnson and the MFDP Controversy," 93.
[37] Parrish, *Citizen Rauh*, 168.

a civil rights fighter and could act as interlocutor between the MFDP and the White House. Reuther, as the leader of the most progressive union in the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), had close relationships with Rauh, Rustin, and King, whose SCLC organization depended on UAW financial support. While Reuther's instincts had probably initially been supportive of the challenge, he fiercely embraced the president's perspective, breaking off contract negotiations with General Motors and chartering a private jet from Detroit to Atlantic City in the middle of the night.

At the convention Humphrey and Reuther urged Rauh and the MFDP to accept a White House-approved compromise, which offered the MFDP two at-large seats for Aaron Henry and Edwin King, guest status for the remaining Freedom delegates, and the promise to establish an investigatory commission that would aid the states in eliminating racial discrimination in the delegate selection procedures by the 1968 convention. It further offered to seat the regular Mississippi delegates so long as they swear loyalty to the national party. Raising the specter of white voter defection, Reuther warned Rauh that "either we're going to lose the Negro vote if you go through with this and don't win, or if you do win, the picture of your all-black delegation going on the floor to replace the white one is going to add to the backlash."[38] Reuther also made it clear to Rauh that the vice-presidential opportunity for Humphrey, their mutual friend and ally, was on the line.

When Rauh proved unmovable, other arms were twisted. California governor Edmund Brown, whose delegation had already come out in favor of the Mississippi challengers, attempted to pressure his fellow California Democrats into quietly withdrawing their support. Inside the Credentials Committee, one California delegate was

---

[38] Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 114.

warned that her support for the MFDP might jeopardize the federal judgeship her husband, president of the Sacramento NAACP, was in line to receive. Reuther, too, delivered a sharp ultimatum to Martin Luther King, telling him that "your funding is on the line. …The kind of money you got from us in Birmingham is there again for Mississippi, but you've got to help us and we've got to help Johnson."[39] With word spreading about Johnson's desire to resolve the Mississippi challenge by compromise, non-southern black convention delegates held a closed-door meeting without the members of the MFDP to express anxiety over their dependence on party patronage and the imperative to reelect the president. Rauh, seeing the tide turn against the Freedom Democrats' challenge on the convention floor, scoured in vain for liberals from northern delegations willing to speak on behalf of the minority report the following night. Senator Paul Douglas, a champion of civil rights from Illinois, begged Rauh to look elsewhere, fearing to appear to betray the wishes of the president. "Don't ask me to do this," he said. "I'm up for reelection in '66."[40]

When the convention officially opened Monday evening, the Credentials Committee begged for additional time to consider the Mississippi challenge. As negotiations had stretched on over the weekend, Committee chair David Lawrence had appointed a subcommittee headed by Humphrey protégé and Minnesota delegate Walter Mondale to come up with an acceptable compromise. Aware that Humphrey's vice-presidency was hanging in the balance, Mondale had a powerful incentive to reach a settlement that did not embarrass the president.[41] One suggestion included deeming all

[39] Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 469.
[40] Parrish, *Citizen Rauh*, 172.
[41] Mondale interview, 1 December 2014, Minneapolis.

the Freedom Democrats honored guests of the convention and offering to seat them in the balcony as observers. All MFDP members rejected the proposal. Aaron Henry denounced the offer as commensurate to the second class citizenship of Jim Crow. During a rally on Atlantic City's boardwalk Sunday evening, he told the demonstrators, "we can sit in the balcony and look on back in Mississippi." [42] Televised vigils and demonstrations continued outside the convention hall as Mondale held round the clock discussions in the Credentials Subcommittee and Rustin and King pressured the MFDP leaders to accept the compromise.

In the early hours of Tuesday morning, a new White House-approved deal was sent to Mondale through Humphrey. Fearing further MFDP intransigence, the full Credentials Committee quickly reconvened before Rauh had time to consult with Henry on the terms of the compromise. Presenting the deal before the committee Mondale acknowledged that there was a "clear pattern of discrimination and intimidation" in Mississippi, but held that the MFDP was nevertheless "a protest movement, not a political party." [43] With the subcommittee's endorsement, the Credentials Committee approved the compromise without the MFDP. The following night, Credentials Committee chair Lawrence presented the final report to the full convention, resolving to seat the regular party delegation so long as they "formally assure the Convention of [their] intention to support [its] nominees" in the general election. Further, in the same language as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the report instructed the DNC to include in its official Call to the 1968 convention the requirement that state Democratic parties select their delegates "regardless of race, color, creed or national origin," guaranteeing all

---

[42] Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 124.

[43] Steven M. Gillon, *The Democrats' Dilemma: Walter F. Mondale and the Liberal Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 73.

voters the "opportunity to participate fully in Party affairs." Lawrence went on to request the creation of a special party committee "to aid the State Democratic Parties in fully meeting the responsibilities and assurances required for inclusion" and for the special committee to report its findings to 1968 convention.[44] At the president's request the report was approved by the convention in a voice vote, avoiding the possibility of a narrow roll call.[45]

While the Atlantic City compromise prevented a minority report from reaching the floor, it satisfied neither delegation from Mississippi. The MFDP's Fannie Lou Hamer responded to the deal with anger: "we didn't come all this way for no two seats!"[46] For Aaron Henry, what was worse than only receiving two seats was that the selection of who would sit in those seats was dictated to them from above.[47] The MFDP dismissed such a maneuver as tokenism: "this kind of dictation is what Negroes in Mississippi … have always faced, and it is precisely this that they are learning to stand up against." Pointing to "the most massive pressure" from the White House, Humphrey, and the party leadership, the MFDP rejected the compromise after the fact, saying that they "did not come to Atlantic City begging for crumbs" but to demand their full democratic rights "in Mississippi and in the Democratic Party." Their challenge had been a test to gauge the commitment to the civil rights movement, and "the convention and the national Democratic Party failed that test."[48] Nor was the compromise palatable to the Mississippi

---

[44] *Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention 1964*, 30-1.
[45] Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 232.
[46] Carson, *In Struggle,* 126.
[47] Aaron Henry Oral History I, LBJ Library; James Farmer Oral History II, Johnson Library.
[48] "Freedom Democratic Party Report: The Convention Challenge," Box 28, Folder: Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1965, ADA Records.

regulars, who nearly all walked out of the convention, refusing to sign the loyalty oath the compromise required.

While disappointment and disillusionment was the prevailing mood of many civil rights activists in the immediate aftermath of the Atlantic City showdown, the president and the press correctly anticipated how awesome a tectonic shift was underway. As Johnson told Reuther, "they [the MFDP] don't know what victory they got. Next time no one can discriminate against Negroes." Newspapers that had supported the challenge, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, greeted the settlement as "spectacular" and a "remarkable victory." The *Denver Post* congratulated the MFDP for "penetrating to the heart of the Democratic party."[49]

Conclusion: Party Incapacity and the Deferral of Reform

But just how the racial politics of the southern Democratic parties would be transformed was unclear. By early 1965, in light of the terms of the Atlantic City compromise set out in the Credentials Committee report approved by the convention, the DNC created the Special Equal Rights Committee (SERC) to "aid the State Democratic Parties in fully meeting the responsibilities and assurances required for inclusion."[50] That the body intended to live up to its mandate was evident in its membership and activities. The official committee was composed of a liberal-leaning crop of DNC members; Joseph Rauh served as associate counsel. The SERC held open hearings in Washington, DC, on minority participation in party affairs, hearing the testimony of the Urban League, the

---

[49] D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 391.
[50] DNC resolution, quoted in Special Equal Rights Committee Chair Richard J. Hughes to William L. Taylor, Staff Director of the US Commission for Civil Rights, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, James O'Hara Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

NAACP, CORE, SNCC, the MFDP, as well as a host of academic experts. Committee

staff collected information regarding how southern state parties conducted delegate

selection procedures, piecing together a partial database that was the first of its kind for a

national party committee. By the summer of 1967, in an interim report to the DNC and all

state party chairs, the Special Equal Rights Committee issued what it called the "six basic

elements" necessary to implement its mandate. These reform measures reiterated the call

for opening the party "at all levels" to members of the Democratic Party, regardless of

race; holding party meetings in publicly disclosed and accessible locations; registering

the "broadest possible" amount of voters, at all levels; as well as publicizing transparent

delegate selection procedures and the qualifications necessary to participate.[51]

However, despite the apparent confidence in a smooth transition evinced by the

president and the press, the potential fractiousness contained in the antidiscrimination

mandate was not lost on those in the SERC itself. Its chairman, New Jersey governor

Richard Hughes, who had served as a member of the Credentials Committee in Atlantic

City, reflected this in his correspondence with the US Civil Rights Commission, where he

underscored that "the relationship of the various State parties to the National [party] is a

matter of consequence in all [our] efforts."[52] He went on:

> State parties operate in accordance to State law and party rules. Such laws
> and rules are not subject to review or approval of the National parties.
> …[T]here are at least 18 different procedures for the selection of delegates
> to the Democratic National Convention, ranging from direct election of all
> delegates and alternates to the appointment of the entire delegation by a
> State Committee. The supreme governing bodies of the National parties
> are the quadrennial conventions which can, and at times do, set forth

---

[51] "Some Basic Elements in Enabling Voter Participation in Party Affairs," Richard Hughes to Party Chairmen, 26 July 1967, Box 12, Folder: Hearings: Special Testimony, DNC Records.
[52] Hughes to Taylor, O'Hara Collection.

certain requirements for party operation and conduct. …[T]he Convention's 1964 mandate on voter participation has been interpreted by the Special Equal Rights Committee to be of such importance that failure on the part of a State delegation to meet this requirement could lead to the sitting of another delegation. …[T]he ultimate penalty thus would be not simply refusal to seat a delegation but its replacement by a legitimate delegation which does meet the conditions of the Call.[53]

But the right to refuse to seat a noncompliant delegation did not rest with the SERC, whose charge was to "aid the state parties" in meeting the antidiscrimination mandate, not enforce discipline on them. Even if the Committee interpreted its charge as "not only to assure the right of political participation [for] all, but [to] facilitate and encourage it," it had little authority or capacity to pressure state Democratic parties to reform.[54] Its records acknowledge this much when they report that "State Party officers, along with National Committee members, have [had to be] reminded periodically … of the [Special Equal Rights] Committee's existence and mission."[55] While the SERC felt "honor-bound" to see that its six basic elements were adhered to "in fact as well as in principle," in preparation of its final report for the 1968 convention chairman Hughes had to send requests to state party chairs imploring their cooperation: "it is of the utmost importance that the Special Equal Rights Committee be informed on the actions taken or contemplated by the various State parties. …May I ask, therefore, that you send me a summary of activities your State organization has engaged in to facilitate and encourage voter participation?"[56]

In recognition of the disparity between their own interpretation of the 1964 mandate and their ability to enforce it, the SERC fell back upon the authority of the

---

[53] Hughes to Taylor, O'Hara Collection.
[54] Hughes to Taylor, O'Hara Collection.
[55] Hughes to Taylor, O'Hara Collection.
[56] Hughes to Chairmen, DNC Records.

national convention, specifically its Credentials Committee, to decertify delegations that are not "broadly representative of the Democrats of the State."[57] Moreover, in its final report the Committee recommended the creation of a permanent equal rights committee, "especially in states where the party controls election machinery and procedures," as well as a new commission on party structure "to study the relationship between the National Democratic Party and its constituent State Democratic Parties, in order that full participation of all Democrats without regard to race may be facilitated by *uniform minimum standards* for structure and operation."[58]

Evidence that others in the national party leadership were inclined to take the Atlantic City mandate seriously was also manifest in Congress, where after the 1964 elections the House Democratic caucus voted to strip Mississippi representative John Bell Williams and South Carolina's Albert Watson of their seniority for openly supporting Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater. Such an assertion of party discipline on its unruly members suggested that the independence of the state parties to set their own rules and define their own platforms might soon be at an end.

However, neither the attempts of DNC chairman Butler in the 1950s nor the credentials challenge of the MFDP at the 1964 convention proved able to overturn the structural power of state party leaders to defy the national party. While the Atlantic City compromise included an antidiscrimination resolution banning racially motivated exclusion in state party practices, the Special Equal Rights Committee recognized that effective implementation of that mandate would have required confronting the institutional legacy of states' rights in the party. Even though antidiscrimination language

---

[57] Hughes to Chairmen, DNC Records.
[58] Report of the Special Equal Rights Committee, 18 August 1968, Box 12, Folder: Hearings; Special Testimony, DNC Records (emphasis added).

had been inserted into the formal Call to the 1968 Convention, neither the DNC nor the SERC had the authority or capacity to intervene in and restructure state party governance.

If the precedent set down in Atlantic City constituted a decisive step in the direction of democratizing the party, it was far from sufficient. Rather, as the first link in a chain of events, the drive to reform the party would be carried forward by subsequent developments. The consensus built around black enfranchisement and desegregation in the South would fracture both the liberal community in the North as well as the broader civil rights movement as the Watts rebellion of 1965 initiated a seemingly continual string of "hot summer" urban riots. The invasion of the Dominican Republic and the escalation of the Vietnam War that same year energized the student movement already in motion, alienating many young antiwar activists from liberalism in general and the Democratic Party in particular. At the same time, average American workers were not immune to the anti-authoritarian ethos permeating the political culture of the late 1960s, evident in the spread of rank-and-file militancy across workplaces, including in defiance of trade union officials. As we will see in the next chapter, the party's handling of the 1964 MFDP controversy and the fairly capacious language of rights to participation adopted in response provided the basis for further intraparty struggles as the political disputes polarizing the New Deal coalition continued to deepen. The party leadership's inability to manage these dynamics helped precipitate a crisis, one that was seen as a window of opportunity for those reformers calling for a new politics.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNDEMOCRATIC PARTY:
ANTIWAR INSURGENCY, PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION,
AND THE PARTY CRISIS OF 1968

State systems for selecting delegates to the National Convention, and the procedures of the Convention itself, display considerably less fidelity to basic democratic principles than a nation which claims to govern itself can safely tolerate.
    --Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential
    Nominees (1968)[1]

The previous chapter has shown how social and political actors inside and outside the Democratic Party challenged the limitations party federalism imposed on the reach of postwar liberalism through the 1950s and 1960s. However, when party federalism was again under scrutiny in 1968, it was not the limits of liberalism that were under challenge, it was the very nature of the liberal project. The explosions of the late 1960s – campus occupations, street demonstrations, urban riots, and rank-and-file worker revolts – effectively unraveled the liberal consensus that had been at the ideological core of the New Deal regime and the Democratic Party leadership since the 1930s and 1940s. The formation of Black Power and the National Organization for Women in 1966 indicated the further splintering of the social movements pushing forward the liberal agenda. The depth of confusion and chaos engulfing liberal politics in the United States immobilized even the paragons of postwar liberalism, such as the United Auto Workers' Walter Reuther, who recognized that there was a "new breed of workers" fueling the upsurge in

---

[1] *The Democratic Choice: A Report of the Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential Nominees*, Box 157, Folder: Democratic National Committee – Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, George S. McGovern Papers, Seely G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

industrial militancy, but could formulate no compelling response to their grievances.[2]

These insurgent energies created a political atmosphere in which the common sense of New Deal liberalism was susceptible to challenge. As the party of the New Deal, the Democrats become a focal target of criticism and struggle.

The Atlantic City compromise of 1964 provided grassroots activists with a new tool to challenge the exclusionary practices of state and local Democratic organizations. Indeed, thanks to the official requirement that voters in each state be granted "the right to participate fully in party affairs" irrespective of their "race, color, creed or national origin," the 1968 Democratic national convention witnessed the greatest single surge in credentials challenges in the history of the party – seventeen challenges involving fifteen state delegations – a development that exacerbated already turbulent proceedings. But crucially, not all of the credentials challenges involved charges of racial discrimination, nor did bulk of challenges even come out of the South. Anti-Vietnam War activists, entering the party through the insurgent primary campaigns of senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, seized on the "right to participate" in the Atlantic City compromise and expanded it into a far-reaching critique of the perceived *undemocratic* character of the party's nominating and convention procedures.

This chapter will examine the role of the turbulent 1968 presidential nominating contest in giving shape, direction, and urgency to the New Politics movement for party reform. Throughout the insurgents' primary campaigns, activists trying to enter the Democratic Party found themselves marginalized, excluded, and outflanked by local and

---

[2] Walter Reuther, *Wall Street Journal*, 20 April 1970, quoted in Sam Gindin, *The Canadian Auto Workers: The Birth and Transformation of a Union* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1995), 143. See also, Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 433.

state party leaders and their almost autocratic exercise of authority. In this chapter I will argue that the structure and operation of Democratic Party institutions frustrated the ability of insurgent activists to gain access and exert what they considered to be meaningful influence on party decisionmaking. As a result of their frustration with trying to "work within the system," insurgents launched an attack on the national Democratic Party in order to contest its nomination process. That attack was sustained by the chaotic events of the 1968 Democratic national convention in Chicago, where Vice President Hubert Humphrey was awarded the nomination without having entered any of the primaries, while McCarthy and Kennedy had swept up major victories. The exclusionary treatment of party insurgents in the nomination battle, as well as their repression in Chicago, drew together a coalition of interests that would drive forward the process of party reform in the aftermath of the 1968 convention.

"Dump Johnson": The Fracturing of Labor-Liberalism

The nature and scope of the New Politics reform movement was so profoundly shaped by the 1968 crisis from which it emerged that it is worth retracing the stages of development that culminated in the turbulent Chicago convention. In retrospect, the origins of the 1968 party crisis are evident on the margins of the liberal left in 1967, where the idea of unseating a Democratic president from the leadership of his own party by denying him renomination first appeared. Foremost among those trying to carve out such a possibility were Allard Lowenstein, a leader of the 1964 Freedom Summer project, and Curtis Gans, formerly of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and a new member of the liberal organization, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Initially, after their idea of

running an independent third party ticket with Martin Luther King and antiwar pediatrician Benjamin Spock had failed to gain traction at a conference calling for a "new politics" in September, Lowenstein and Gans had sought a base of support in the ADA for their strategy to dump President Lyndon Johnson.[3]

Americans for Democratic Action, the foremost organization of cold war labor-liberalism, had since 1966 become increasingly frustrated with President Johnson, whom they criticized as being insufficiently committed to his domestic War on Poverty policy agenda and whose Vietnam foreign policy raised considerable doubts among the more dovish members of the liberal community. Such friction had opened fault lines within ADA itself, pitting a traditional anticommunist wing against a growing minority that looked upon the antiwar protest movement as an opportunity to pull alienated youth into the political process while promoting the status of ADA within its ranks. In the middle, moderates like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. raised concerns about opposing a president who had, in fact, enacted the kind of liberal program which ADAers had been advocating for twenty years, and who had selected the ADA's own Hubert Humphrey as his running mate in 1964. But as the war escalated and prominent senators such as George McGovern, J. William Fulbright, and Robert Kennedy began voicing their skepticism in public, ADA moderates and reformers formed a united front within the organization. While acknowledging that most of what had been enacted as national policy by 1966 had been in the ADA platform in 1947, John Kenneth Galbraith insisted, "it cannot be the highest function of the modern liberal to work avidly to accomplish what has already

---

[3] See James Ridgeway, "Freak-Out in Chicago: The National Conference of New Politics," *The New Republic*, 16 September 1967.

been done."[4] By the spring of 1967, the ADA officially went on record as "willing to support a peace candidate from either party if Johnson did not change his [Vietnam] policy."[5]

But the ADA's willingness to break from LBJ was quickly revealed to be a bluff, meant only to apply public pressure for a policy change, not commit themselves to a quixotic adventure. They greeted Lowenstein's Dump Johnson proposal with a heavy dose of skepticism. Joseph Rauh, exiled from the White House since the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party controversy, rejected the idea on the grounds that "no responsible people inside the Democratic Party will allow their names to be connected with … so helpless a drive."[6] Galbraith insisted that the ADA had to maintain its "longstanding commitment to political realities" and not put itself in a position where it could too easily be lumped together with the radical antiwar positions being advanced by the New Left.[7] For all their criticism of the president's foreign policy and its domestic costs for the Great Society, Lowenstein's campaign to dump Johnson was too radical a strategy for the ADA in 1967.

After the ADA had balked, Lowenstein brought his Dump Johnson campaign to university campuses in a speaking tour to drum up support across the country. While the influence of SDS and other New Left organizations had a powerful pull on many antiwar student activists, the former's increasingly inflammatory rhetoric had a polarizing effect on many who still considered themselves liberal Democrats. Drawing on networks forged

---

[4] John Kenneth Galbraith, quoted in Andrew Kopkind, "Humphrey's Old Pals: An Account of the ADA Convention," *The New Republic*, 7 May 1966.
[5] William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 265.
[6] Joseph Rauh, quoted in Chafe, *Never Stop Running*, 265.
[7] John Kenneth Galbraith, quoted in Steven M. Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 193.

in the civil rights and antiwar mobilizations, as well as their contacts in the National Student Association, Lowenstein and Gans laid the groundwork for an anti-LBJ coalition, patching together an infrastructure of constituency groups who shared their vision for radical change through the political system.

Coinciding with their campaign that September, former Johnson aide and speechwriter Richard Goodwin, credited with coining the phrase "the Great Society," wrote a piece for *The New Yorker* (under a pseudonym) that questioned whether a sitting president could not be unseated by being denied his party's nomination.[8] "The rules of [politics]," Goodwin argued, "are only a summary of what's happened before."[9] The options facing concerned Democrats, he suggested, were theirs to create. Following such an endorsement of Lowenstein's basic political strategy, Democratic Party members began to sign on, including Wisconsin party chair and future New Politics reformer Donald O. Peterson, as well as antiwar Democrat Alpha Smaby of Minnesota. As press coverage began to grow, the Dump Johnson movement gained momentum and credibility. The tide seemed to be turning when the state party chair of Michigan – a state organization deeply integrated with the United Auto Workers (UAW) – embraced the idea, as did the party's youth organizations in Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Dump Johnson affiliate organizations cropped up across the country, calling themselves the Coalition for a Democratic Alternative, the Conference for Concerned Democrats, and Concerned Democrats for America. At the end of September, *The New Republic* ran a

---

[8] In his memoir, Goodwin acknowledges the impact Students for a Democratic Society's *Port Huron Statement* had on his own thinking when framing Johnson's domestic agenda as the Great Society. After resigning from the Johnson administration in 1965 he went on to contribute speeches to Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in their 1968 presidential campaigns. See Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 275-6.
[9] Bailey Laird [Richard Goodwin], "A Political Fiction," *New Yorker*, 16 September 1967; Chafe, *Never Stop Running*, 267.

front-page editorial endorsing the campaign, writing, "we don't know whether Lyndon Johnson can be denied. … [But] we do know the attempt must be made."[10]

The public opinion polls that fall confirmed that an alternative to Johnson had some popular basis, as the president's approval rating continued its slide from 61 percent in January 1966 to 38 percent by October 1967. However, Lowenstein understood that without a rival candidate, the campaign to dump Johnson would remain a chimera. His first preference, Robert Kennedy, was the logical choice. Having served as attorney general in his brother's administration, his criticisms of the Vietnam War from his newly acquired Senate seat lent an air of authority and respectability to the growing antiwar movement. However, despite several Lowenstein overtures, Kennedy demurred, fearing that his well-known animosity for the president (and LBJ's animosity for him) would be a liability, casting him as a party-splitter for the sake of a personal vendetta. For the moment, Kennedy followed the advice of his seasoned advisors and refrained from taking Lowenstein up on his offer.[11]

In November 1967, after Senator George McGovern also declined, Gans and Lowenstein finally found a figure willing to carry the Dump Johnson banner into battle in Minnesota's Senator Eugene McCarthy. Dump Johnson partisans viewed McCarthy with a mix of emotions. Liberal doves were grateful to find any prominent Democrat willing to risk reputation and patronage by openly challenging an incumbent president and party leader. On the other hand, some of McCarthy's political views, which were often opaque, gave liberals pause. His criticisms of executive power cut against the grain of postwar

---

[10] "Hitched to LBJ?" *The New Republic*, 30 September 1967; Chafe, *Never Stop Running*, 269.

[11] See Joseph A. Palermo, *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), chapter 37.

labor-liberalism, which, for all the frustrations with Johnson's "imperial presidency," continued to view a Democratic White House as the bastion of progress in the face of congressional obstruction. Additionally, McCarthy's views on the Great Society programs were, in the words of his biographer, "extremely ambiguous," simultaneously decrying its lack of funding while portraying it as a bureaucratic imposition from above.[12] This ambivalence surrounding McCarthy's role as the Dump Johnson standard-bearer was reflected by the candidate himself when he announced his intention to enter several of the party's primary elections the following year. He expressed his concern that "the administration seems to have set no limits on the price that it is willing to pay for military victory," but did not indicate that he thought he could defeat Johnson, nor did he ever say that he was intent on capturing the nomination or even the presidency.[13] Rather than a serious campaign for the highest office, McCarthy saw his candidacy as a vehicle for protest against the war and a means by which the alienated and the frustrated could be drawn "back into the political process."[14]

> I am hopeful that a challenge may alleviate the sense of political helplessness and restore to many people a belief in the processes of American politics and of American government. On college campuses especially, but among other thoughtful adult Americans, it may counter the growing sense of alienation from politics which is currently reflected in a tendency to withdraw in either frustration or cynicism, to talk of nonparticipation and to make threats of support for a third party or fourth party or other irregular political movements.[15]

---

[12] Dominick Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar Liberalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 179. See also, Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 893-4.

[13] Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 207.

[14] Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 207. See also, Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy*, 173.

[15] George Rising, *Clean for Gene: Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential Campaign* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 62-3.

While hardly the bold declaration of principled defiance that Lowenstein and Gans had been searching for, McCarthy's announcement was greeted positively by prominent liberal publications like the *New York Times*, *The Nation*, and *The New Republic*, while the White House regarded it as simply a "joke."[16]

By early 1968, McCarthy's plan to enter the primaries exacerbated the preexisting rifts in labor-liberalism over Vietnam, especially in the ADA, where a groundswell of antiwar sentiment was bubbling up through its local chapters on college and university campuses around the country and pushing for the organization to officially endorse the insurgent. After the Tet offensive, many ADA skeptics got off the fence and agreed that an insurgent gambit was not only the morally right thing to do but also the only way to channel the growing radicalism of the antiwar movement into responsible outlets. Meeting in Washington, DC, in February, Galbraith affirmed this view before the ADA national board when he said, "if one stands up for an idea one must stand up for the man who espouses it."[17] Having shed his initial skepticism of the Dump Johnson insurgency, Rauh, too, warned that because the ADA had already come out against the war, failure to support McCarthy would only confirm what the New Left had come to suspect: that liberals were "total and complete captives of any Democratic administration."[18]

While very strong, however, support for McCarthy was far from unanimous in the liberal organization. Opposing antiwar liberals at the February board meeting were moderate labor leaders who feared what endorsement might cost them in terms of legislative influence, access to the president, and public accusations concerning their

---

[16] Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy*, 174.
[17] John Kenneth Galbraith, quoted in Paul R. Wieck, "ADA Goes for McCarthy," *The New Republic*, 24 February 1968.
[18] Quoted in Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 208.

patriotism. Rather than sweeping the antiwar movement into the liberal fold, they argued, the ADA's embrace of the insurgent candidate promised to diminish their influence, splitting the organization down the middle by siding with a fringe movement out of step with the American mainstream. UAW president Walter Reuther voiced his concern that "a primary endorsement would almost certainly alienate and offend members," while his brother Victor threatened that an ADA endorsement would put the UAW's financial support for the organization in "serious jeopardy."[19] They were joined by Gus Tyler of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), who called the Dump Johnson effort "unproductive," and Bayard Rustin, who was "profoundly against" endorsing McCarthy because of the of single-issue nature of his campaign, which lacked appeal with people of color. Leon Keyserling, former economic advisor to President Harry Truman, chided ADA doves for their "overpowering obsession" with Vietnam, having "turned [their] back on progressive economic and social policies on the domestic front."[20] ADA endorsement, they threatened, would break the liberal-labor coalition, without which "America [could] be swept into a dismal abyss of prolonged reaction."[21]

These protestations notwithstanding, the ADA national board approved early endorsement of Eugene McCarthy 65 to 47, as three labor leaders – I.W. Abel of the Steelworkers, Joseph Beirne of the Communication Workers, and Louis Stulberg of the ILGWU – resigned in protest, taking their financial contributions with them. A Texas Democrat from the House of Representatives followed, as did Keyserling and White

---

[19] Walter Reuther, quoted in Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 209; Victor Reuther, quoted in Wieck, "ADA Goes for McCarthy."

[20] Memo from Leon Keyserling to ADA National Board, "What Has Happened to the ADA?" Box 36, Folder: Leon Keyserling Matter, 1967-68, ADA Records, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

[21] Wieck, "ADA Goes for McCarthy"; Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 210.

House staff member John Roche, who stated that he "was not interested in a trip to political Disneyland."[22] Those who stayed, such as the Reuthers and the ILGWU's David Dubinsky, issued a statement a week later which expressed that their disagreement over one issue could not be allowed to jeopardize the entire organization or the coalition of forces it represented.

The ADA's decision to endorse, however, was soon vindicated. On March 12th, 1967, McCarthy achieved a surprisingly strong second place finish in the New Hampshire primary. *Newsweek* called it a "triumph of heroic magnitude" and raised the possibility that Lyndon Johnson "may be in real danger of being dumped by his own party."[23] *New York Times* columnist James Reston speculated on the capacity of machine politicians and labor leaders to block an insurgent challenge, noting that "the idea is getting around that politics is too serious a business to be left to politicians," and if such a democratic ethos continues to spread "even the will of an incumbent president can be overcome."[24] Under intensifying criticism from the press and keenly sensitive to the shifting mood of the electorate, Johnson evaded the presidential primaries, sending stand-in candidates when he could or failing to make any appearance at all in states where his own name appeared on the ballot. As one internal White House memo explained,

---

[22] John Roche, quoted in Wieck, "ADA Goes for McCarthy."

[23] Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy*, 186; Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, 865. Exit polling, however, showed that McCarthy's strength in New Hampshire did not necessarily translate into voters' opposition to the war. In fact, according to Sandbrook, most voters were ignorant of the senator's dovish position on the war and, had they been aware, would not have voted for him. In a survey conducted by the University of Michigan, three out of five McCarthy supporters felt that LBJ's mishandling of the war was due to his insufficiently aggressive tactics. McCarthy's victory in New Hampshire then was more of an anti-Johnson vote than an antiwar vote. See Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy*, 184.

[24] Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 292.

the presidential primaries are a totally valid testing ground for candidates in the party out of power. [However], an incumbent president who has to rely on being active [in] the presidential primaries for his nomination would be operating from a position of weakness and be risking the antagonism of the American people for involving himself in political campaign activity long before the November election. [This serves as] justification for not entering any primaries.[25]

But Robert Kennedy's eventual entry into the primaries presented a greater threat than the president was prepared to handle. As he later explained to historian Doris Kearns,

The thing I feared from the first day of my presidency was actually coming true. Robert Kennedy had openly announced his intention to reclaim the throne in the memory of his brother. And the American people, swayed by the magic of the name, were dancing in the streets. The whole situation was unbearable for me. After thirty-seven years in public service, I deserved something more than being left alone in the middle of the plain, chased by stampedes on every side.[26]

With the president's poll numbers at a low of 36 percent by late March, Gallup surveys of Democratic voters released around the same time found a greater preference for Kennedy than Johnson or McCarthy as the party's nominee. Before departing to oversee the president's write-in campaign for Wisconsin's April 2nd primary, Johnson's party liaison Lawrence O'Brien warned the president of the "ever deepening disenchantment among many segments of the population which have heretofore supported our actions in Vietnam," including among "our political friends and associates."[27]

---

[25] Lawrence O'Brien Oral History XXI, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, available at www.lbjlibrary.com.

[26] Lyndon Johnson, quoted in Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 77-8.

[27] Lawrence O'Brien, quoted in Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 294.

On March 31st, two days before the Wisconsin primary, where he was trailing in the polls, Johnson informed the nation in a primetime television address that he would temporarily halt the bombing of North Vietnam and enter into negotiations with Hanoi. Further, he announced that he would not seek nor accept the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party in 1968.

Party Insurgency and the Politics of Presidential Nomination

Even if the combined pressure of the McCarthy and Kennedy insurgencies, military setbacks abroad, and the social turmoil at home had knocked Johnson out of the race, neither insurgent candidate stood much of a chance of capturing the presidential nomination of a party that was organizationally and ideologically set against their campaigns. While animosity between McCarthyites and Kennedy supporters sharpened in the aftermath of Johnson's withdrawal, their mutual experiences of party resistance to their participation led to a convergence of forces around the idea of party reform.

Only seventeen states held presidential primaries in 1968, apportioning a total of just 38 percent of the national convention's delegates when a majority was needed to win. Even if McCarthy or Kennedy swept the primaries, they would fall short of victory. Both candidates understood that while primary elections could help their final delegate counts, their real significance was in demonstrating their electoral viability to important party actors so that enough of the remaining 62 percent of delegates – or more accurately, the party leaders who controlled them – would come over to their side by the time of the convention. As Lawrence O'Brien, who had become Kennedy's campaign manager after resigning his post in the Johnson administration, later put it, "our strategy was to use the

primaries to prove Bob was a winner. Conceivably, the convention delegates, seeking a winner or perhaps in a surge of Kennedy emotion, might have moved from Hubert [Humphrey] to Bob in sufficient numbers to give Bob the nomination."[28]

As the passage indicates, while Johnson had withdrawn from the presidential contest, Vice President Hubert Humphrey had taken his place, formally announcing his candidacy a month after Johnson's withdrawal – a delay calculated to keep the vice president out of the primaries so as to avoid having to defend the increasingly unpopular war. While Humphrey's decision to forgo the primaries risked drawing the charge that he had not tested himself "before the people," skipping the remaining primaries after Johnson's exit did not jeopardize his candidacy whatsoever. As we have seen, most convention delegates were selected through caucus-convention procedures undertaken at the state level or simply by state committee appointment. In fact, as the party reform commission would later reveal, a full one-third of the delegates to the 1968 Democratic convention had already been selected through these channels well before McCarthy had even announced his candidacy in November 1967. These delegates, who had been committed to reelecting President Johnson, transferred their allegiance to his heir apparent. Indeed, in the days between Johnson's surprise withdrawal and Humphrey's official announcement, calls from state party leaders, big city mayors, and the top officials of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) poured into the vice president's office, pledging their support should he decide to enter the race. Two days after his official entry, the vice president's campaign

---

[28] Lawrence O'Brien Oral History XXII, Johnson Library.

staff estimated that 1,200 of the necessary 1,312 delegate votes were committed to Humphrey or leaning his way.[29]

Robert Kennedy and the Making of a New Democratic Coalition

Facing such a disadvantageous terrain in which it was clear that "Humphrey had the edge," Kennedy's team planned to demonstrate the extent of his popular, "street-level" appeal by knitting together an alternative Democratic coalition of the disaffected and marginalized.[30] This included not only bringing back in those who were becoming increasingly alienated from the political process, but also mobilizing those who had never been fully integrated, such as African Americans, Latinos, and low-income voters.[31] Thus, it was "essentially an organizational contest," they said, "not one of public relations or mass media concentration."[32] As one campaign memo, written just prior to Johnson's withdrawal, read:

> The existing and potential popular support for RFK's positions and candidacy is located in places, communities, and individuals that do not normally select or affect the choice and positions of delegates – in youth, in the ghetto, in the poor, and in the great mass of idealistic people found in every stratum of society. The challenge they – and we – face is to forge this variegated potential into a cohesive force so powerful that it can perform the unprecedented feat of unseating a President from his party's nomination, despite the fact that he has at his disposal the full power of

---

[29] Marty Cohen et al., *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 216.

[30] O'Brien Oral History XXII, Johnson Library.

[31] See Memo from Fraser Barrow to Night Reading, 11 April 1968, 1968 Presidential Campaign National Headquarters Files, Youth/Student Division, Box 5, Folder: Grassroots Activities, Robert Kennedy Papers, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.

[32] Memorandum from Larry O'Brien to Steve Smith, 18 May 1968, Box 5, Folder: Memoranda: To Campaign Headquarters, RFK Papers.

patronage of the traditional party structure, of political inertia, and of an appeal to unity in a time of war.[33]

Meeting such an "extraordinary challenge," the memo continued,

> will require extraordinary strategy, machinery, and risks. …It will require broad-based participation in the political process … offering the disenfranchised, the disheartened, the alienated, and the frustrated, as well as the disapproving and the dissatisfied, a chance to focus on the issues, a means of making the political establishment listen, and a hope of getting results and action.[34]

Indeed, the visionary qualities of Kennedy's campaign rhetoric drew on the popular frustrations being registered across the US, offering those who wanted "to build a new political community" a vehicle of expression. That range of social forces, who, Kennedy argued, are "helping to make participatory democracy a reality," presented the nation with an opportunity for reform and renewal by channeling the energy of those alienated and marginalized inside the political process – not merely to contain them but to revitalize those structures themselves.[35]

Labor, Vietnam, and the Democratic Party

But while Kennedy hoped to peel party leaders and their delegates away from Humphrey by demonstrating the viability of his alternative coalition, the idea of a new Democratic Party gained little traction among the top officials of the trade union hierarchy. This was

---

[33] Memo for EMK/SES/TCS/et al., re: Youth/Student/Community Organization Effort, 25 March 1968, Box 5, Folder: Memoranda: To Campaign Headquarters, RFK Papers.

[34] Memo for EMK/SES/TCS/et al., RFK Papers.

[35] Memo from Senator Robert F. Kennedy to Youth and Students re: The 1968 Campaign, 1968 Presidential Campaign, National Headquarters Youth/Student Division, Subject File, Box 5, Folder: Memoranda, RFK Papers. As another strategy memo relayed, when confronted by "some very cynical Kennedy detractors," a Kennedy organizer told them "if they were afraid of being 'used' by Kennedy, they could 'use' him to bring about some positive changes in the political structure." See Memo to Jim Flug and Marion Wright from Steve Arons, "Counter Primaries," 1968 Presidential Campaign National Headquarters, Speechwriters Division, Box 5, Folder: Presidential Campaign: General, RFK Papers.

as Kennedy anticipated. As the candidate had told journalist David Frost, "I think there has to be a new kind of coalition to keep the Democratic Party going. … We have to write off the unions and the South now … [and] replace them with Negroes, blue-collar whites, and the kids."[36] Another journalist close with the Kennedy campaign explained that "to Kennedy's eyes, the AFL-CIO leadership was committed politically to Lyndon Johnson, committed emotionally to the Vietnam War, and not committed at all to organizing the new, invisible poor."[37] Indeed, while the labor leadership normally exerted their influence in presidential politics through channels of elite brokerage at the national convention, in 1968 AFL-CIO officials intervened directly in the nomination process to a greater extent than ever before. This had commenced the moment Johnson had announced his exit from the race. As labor federation president George Meany later said, "[after Johnson's withdrawal] Lane [Kirkland] and I went over to see Hubert Humphrey and got him to agree he would run."[38] Then-AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Lane Kirkland also later recalled,

> I was involved with others in putting together a committee – a labor committee – for Hubert Humphrey. It was an informal operation. …The members of our committee included every general officer of every affiliate of the AFL-CIO. …Labor, then, was instrumental in rounding up the delegate votes to get him nominated. We didn't do that by participating in primary elections. …But in the non-primary states, we rounded up most of the votes.[39]

---

[36] Robert Kennedy, quoted in Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 75.

[37] Jack Newfield, quoted in Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 79.

[38] George Meany, quoted in Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 80.

[39] Remarks of AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland at Meeting of State Federation Officers, "Labor in Partisan Politics," 29 September 1982, Committee on Political Education Records (unprocessed), George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD. See also, Dark, *Unions and the Democrats*, 81.

That a committed anticommunist like George Meany put the full weight of his organizational strength behind the vice president to ensure the failure of the antiwar insurgents is unsurprising. However, even top labor officials who privately articulated their disagreements with the Johnson administration's foreign policy hesitated to take any action that could jeopardize their access to the White House or Democratic members of Congress. A particularly poignant display of this dilemma involved Walter Reuther, president of the UAW (which had disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO in 1968), when Barry Bluestone and Leslie Woodcock, children of top UAW officials and members of SDS, confronted him at a family gathering. The two recited antiwar poetry from the WWI era and read aloud Martin Luther King's condemnation of the war in Vietnam. When pressed to make a public statement of the UAW's support for an end to the conflict, Reuther responded that the subject had been debated at length inside the union and that he personally believed the war to be wrong, but added that "we have major contract negotiations coming up … [and] this is not the time to break with the President on this issue." Woodcock, shocked and appalled, responded, "What are you trying to do, maybe get eighty cents [more] an hour in the pay envelop, five cents here, five cents there? You're telling me that you are unwilling to make a statement that may save fifty thousand lives or one hundred thousand lives or maybe a million lives because you want to get fifty more cents in your goddamn fucking contract?"[40] Reuther, caught in the dilemma, kept the UAW neutral in the race.

But for all the apparent solidity of the labor leadership's consensus on the Democratic administration's war in Vietnam, the labor rank and file were not nearly as

---

[40] See Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, 420-1; and Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 46-7.

homogenous – a weakness that Kennedy sought to exploit. Since the escalation of the war

in 1965, significant subnational labor organizations had been speaking out. New York's

Health and Hospital Workers Local 1199 was the earliest, followed soon after by the

Negro American Labor Council, the trade union division of SANE, and some of the top

officials in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.[41] By 1967, a group of nearly five

hundred union leaders within the AFL-CIO mounted a challenge to the federation's

official pro-war position.[42] As opposed to any simplistic depiction of hawkish working

class "hard hats," the dissension within the ranks of organized labor reflected the

complex dynamics of workers' political attitudes at the end of the New Deal order, a

moment in which American workers moved left, right, and center.[43] In her detailed study

of working class attitudes in the Vietnam era, Penny Lewis has shown that "working-

class people were never more likely than their middle-class counterparts to support the

war, and in many instances, they were more likely to oppose it."[44] While such opposition

did not typically result in participation in the student-led antiwar movement, which many

workers found unpatriotic, elitist, and distasteful, it did represent a liability for the labor

and party leadership. The UAW lost top staffers Jack Conway and Paul Schrade who

went to work for Kennedy over the objections of Reuther, while ADA liberals such as

Joseph Rauh, Arthur Schlesinger, and John Kenneth Galbraith broke from the vice

---

[41] Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since WWII* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 240-1.

[42] Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1994), 219. See also, Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 49.

[43] See Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*.

[44] Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 53.

president – their former friend and ally – over his obstinate defense of Johnson's Vietnam policy.[45]

"The pressure of legitimacy"

Most importantly, while Kennedy's strategy centered on demonstrating the breadth and depth of his popular support among his new Democratic coalition, his team planned for a direct confrontation with the structure and operation of the national party convention. In case party leaders remained impassive regarding his primary victories, Kennedy's team developed a multipronged convention strategy designed to implicate the party's nominating procedures as unfair, unresponsive, and undemocratic. This included a suggestion to hold "counter primaries" in caucus-convention states as an MFDP-type demonstration of popular support.[46] While this tactic was ultimately rejected, the Kennedy team did plan to file credentials challenges against southern delegations on the grounds that "any black representation they may have is purely formal tokenism." Kennedy had already been in touch with black Mississippi activists planning to employ the Atlantic City compromise in a second attack on the regular party, as they had done in 1964. If successful, these credentials contests would have the effect of "cracking one leg of Humphrey's support."[47]

More significant, however, was that Kennedy's team also planned on bringing credentials challenges against delegations from outside the South, against northern state party organizations that "have effectively prevented any expression of popular will." To

---

[45] See Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 306-7.

[46] Memo, "Counter Primaries," RFK Papers.

[47] Memo to Peter Edelman et al. from Arthur I. Waskow, 3 June 1968, 1968 Presidential Campaign National Headquarters, Speechwriters Division, Box 5, Folder: "Presidential Campaign: General," RFK Papers. See also, Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 307.

be successful, these challenges would require utilizing more "unorthodox means" because these state delegations largely complied with the antidiscrimination mandate spelled out by the Special Equal Rights Committee (SERC).[48] To expand the reach of the SERC's "right to participate," Kennedy's people targeted the unit rule, a procedural device used by party leaders to cast a delegation's votes as a bloc, binding those in the minority to the will of the majority.[49] In the judgment of veteran Kennedy advisor Theodore Sorensen, "we are not going to get any votes [at the convention] if [the] unit rule is in effect."[50] From his perspective, Kennedy's level of support was grossly diminished by the unit rule's distortions, which silenced minority dissent from the precinct level up, giving the false appearance of a pro-Humphrey consensus among delegates at the national level. In fact, Kennedy had received a large volume of correspondence from supporters during the campaign, which reported the turmoil within state conventions and county Democratic caucuses and the crackdown on rank-and-file dissent by the "Democratic Establishment."[51]

By bringing what they called "the pressure of legitimacy" to bear on delegate selection processes affected by racial discrimination as well as the unit rule, Kennedy's convention strategy picked up and substantially expanded the Mississippi challenge in Atlantic City four years earlier.[52] No longer an issue confined to allegations of racial prejudice exercised by southern party elites, or even the hypocrisy of the national party's

---

[48] Memo, Waskow to Edelman et al., RFK Papers.

[49] See the series of memoranda in RFK 1968 Presidential Campaign, Box 3, Folder: "Unit Rule: Southern States," Abram Chayes Papers, Kennedy Library. See also, Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, 307-8.

[50] Notes, RFK Presidential Campaign Papers, Black Books, Box 2, Folder: Alabama Background and Intelligence, RFK Papers.

[51] See Correspondence: Subject File, 1968, Box 13, Folder: "Democratic Party: New York State," RFK Senate Papers, Kennedy Library.

[52] Memo, Waskow to Edelman et al., RFK Papers.

tolerance of such practices, Kennedy's critique of the party implicated the *lawful functioning* of Democratic procedure on the basis of its undemocratic and unrepresentative character.[53] The accusations would not be about "vote-stealing," his aides said, but the more substantive problem of failing to accurately represent popular preferences. The solution, one memo indicated, required nothing less than "democratizing the party."[54]

The Miscounted McCarthy Campaign: Frustrating the "Democratic Choice"

Within the McCarthy campaign, a strategy that pointed toward "democratizing the party" emerged at the grassroots level as campaign activists experienced systematic exclusion, marginalization, and victimization at the hands of the party's delegate selection procedures and the party regulars overseeing them. Initially having made common cause through Allard Lowenstein's Dump Johnson movement and its crop of organizational vehicles around the country, Joseph Duffey, an assistant professor at Hartford Seminary, and about a dozen other concerned Connecticut Democrats made the decision to spearhead the McCarthy effort in their home state. The group had set about investigating local party structures and procedures to better orient their strategy, resulting in a document, written by Geoffrey Cowan, a Yale law student and McCarthy coordinator for the state, entitled, "The System: You Have to Know It to Beat It."[55]

---

[53] Sam Rosenfeld, "A Choice, Not an Echo: Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014), 187.

[54] Memo, "Counter Primaries," RFK Papers.

[55] Interview with Geoffrey Cowan (phone), 16 April 2016. See also, Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 444.

The system to beat was formidable indeed. Connecticut was home to a fairly robust Democratic Party machine run by state chairman John Bailey, in place since 1948 (locals called him King John), and who had served as chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) since 1961. As a traditional, loyal Democrat, Bailey cast himself as an instrument in service to the party leader. In early January 1968, in light of McCarthy's nomination challenge, Bailey had already publicly declared, "the Democratic National Convention is as good as over. …It'll be Lyndon Johnson and that's that."[56] If local McCarthyites were to succeed in beating the system, they were going to have to confront one of the most powerfully positioned actors in that system, and that power was felt almost immediately. While they encountered relatively few problems participating in party caucuses in small towns around the state, Connecticut McCarthyites confronted more serious obstacles to participation in larger towns and cities, where local committees selected state convention delegates. The only method of challenging them was to propose a rival slate of delegates, endorsed by at least 5 percent of local residents, and payment of a filing fee. The total cost of filing fees for mounting a statewide challenge was $14,000. (Filing as a party-endorsed slate, however, was free of charge.)[57]

These obstacles notwithstanding, the McCarthy insurgents managed to win about 30 percent of the delegates to Connecticut's state convention in June. But when Bailey summoned Joseph Duffey to the negotiating table, the party chair told him, "if you behave responsibly, we might have no objection to giving you one or two seats on the [national convention] delegation." [58] Of the forty-four delegate seats allotted to

[56] Chester et al., *An American Melodrama*, 441-2.
[57] See Chester et al., *An American Melodrama*, 443; as well as Lanny J. Davis, *The Emerging Democratic Majority: Lessons and Legacies from the New Politics* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974), 41.
[58] Bailey, quoted in Chester, et al., *An American Melodrama*, 445.

Connecticut by the DNC, McCarthy forces claimed no less than thirteen to reflect a proportionate representation of their strength in the state convention.[59] Failing to come to an agreement, the McCarthy forces filed a credentials challenge with the DNC against the Connecticut delegation and walked out of the convention.[60]

The experience of the Connecticut McCarthyites, however, was no outlier. In locales across the country, pro-McCarthy and Kennedy activists found themselves subject to the arbitrary power of the local or state Democratic Party officials, who overwhelmingly favored Lyndon Johnson, and subsequently Hubert Humphrey, as the presidential nominee. In Washington State, insurgents protested the "steamroller" and "dictatorial" tactics employed by regular party officials, and charged the state committee with "den[ying] voters the opportunity to participate fully in party affairs" by appointing twelve ex-officio or automatic delegates to the national delegation without ratification by the state convention.[61] In Minnesota, McCarthy activists denounced a rotten boroughs system that distributed national delegates evenly across the state's counties, claiming it violated the Supreme Court's recent principle of one-person, one-vote, which favored representation according to population rather than geography. The results, they contended, diluted the strength of McCarthy support, which was strongest in large population centers like Minneapolis-St. Paul. In New York, insurgents challenged the

---

[59] While measurement of presidential preference was not a routine practice of the Democratic Party's delegate selection procedures before the reforms, McCarthy supporters pointed to a rough surrogate that they claimed measured their strength: a McCarthy-backed resolution introduced to the Connecticut state convention, asking that each state delegate declare their presidential preference, was supported by 282 of the delegates – that is, about 30 percent. Also worth considering, with the benefit of hindsight, is the fact that when the McCarthyites staged a walkout of the state convention, a third of the convention vacated. See the discussion of the Connecticut credentials challenge in *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1968), 103; as well as Chester, et al., *An American Melodrama*, 442; and Davis, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, 56-8.

[60] For an insider account of the Connecticut convention walkout, see Geoffrey Cowan to Theodore H. White, 1 August 1969, Box 149.C.14.2F, Folder: Miscellaneous Packet, Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN.

[61] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 100-1.

state committee's authority to appoint at-large members to the national delegation without having to take into consideration the relative proportions of candidate support in the state primary. In Michigan, district level caucuses with pro-Humphrey majorities had invoked use of the unit rule to bind the minority to the majority's decision, but restricted the use of the same mechanism in districts where caucus majorities favored McCarthy. In Indiana, the caucus chairs had simply violated standard parliamentary procedure, refusing to recognize insurgent participants, removing their names from nomination, denying their motions, and in some cases wrapping up the entire proceedings in only two or three minutes.[62]

The most egregious instance of abuse came in Pennsylvania, the fourth largest state in the Union and possessor of 130 delegate votes. There, in its April primary election, held before Hubert Humphrey had officially announced his candidacy, McCarthy finished with a major victory, bringing in close to 430,000 votes compared to Robert Kennedy's 65,500 and Lyndon Johnson's 73,000. However, following the primary, the state Democratic committee, controlled by the mayors of Pittsburg and Philadelphia and top Steelworkers officials, appointed an additional 52 members to the state's delegation, only one of which was a McCarthy supporter. Having registered over 70 percent support in the state primary, McCarthy's support subsequently was diluted or erased. The Pennsylvania delegation cast 80 percent of their votes for Humphrey on the first ballot in Chicago.[63]

In late June, after having walked out the Connecticut state convention in protest, McCarthy partisans began organizing a strategic response at the forthcoming Chicago

---

[62] These instances are all drawn from *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*.

[63] On the case of Pennsylvania, see Chester et al., *An American Melodrama*, 171; Davis, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, 41-2; and *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 101.

convention. At the core of their grievances was the perception that their exclusion from the party had been unfair because it was undemocratic. [64] This raised questions concerning the rules and practices of the state parties, specifically regarding their delegate selection processes. But such procedures were often opaque, a fact that local party leaders were not often eager to correct. (As the reform commission would later reveal, ten state parties did not even possess written rules in 1968.) And even when the organization's rules and procedures could be discerned in advance, as with Cowan's pamphlet on how to beat "The System" in Connecticut, they often revealed the degree to which party affairs were conducted "at the discretion of the chairman."[65] With only two months left before the national convention, members of the Connecticut McCarthy leadership set about planning to mount a comprehensive challenge to the party's nominating system, which made the case for reform.

The main problem facing the McCarthy reformers was that there was little legal basis upon which to mount their challenge. There was, as Cowan put it, "no *law* to go on." [66] Nor was there any comprehensive record of state parties' delegate selection procedures. The proposed solution was to put together an investigative commission outside the party that could produce a study documenting the processes by which state delegations were composed and how presidential candidates won the nomination. With the Mississippi Freedom Democrats experience in mind, they figured this would provide a basis for contesting what the McCarthy insurgents considered to be unfair practices and

---

[64] William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), 31.
[65] Chester et al., *An American Melodrama*, 444.
[66] Quoted in Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983), 15.

a vehicle for galvanizing support for their credentials challenge inside the Chicago convention.[67]

By early August, only three weeks before the Chicago convention began, Cowan had put together what became known as the Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential Nominees. Soliciting a modest grant from a McCarthy supporter and publisher in New York, and tapping Thomas Alder, a veteran of the civil rights movement, as commission director, the two filled out the commission with Eli Segal as liaison with the McCarthy campaign; Anne Wexler, vice chair of the Connecticut McCarthy committee; Harold Hughes, governor of Iowa, who agreed to chair the commission; Representative Donald Fraser of Minnesota, a Humphrey supporter despite his own opposition to the Vietnam War; Kennedy confidant Frederick Dutton; former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activist and current Georgia state representative, Julian Bond; *Washington Star* political columnist Doris Kimball; and academics Harry Ashmore of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, and Alexander Bickel, a law professor at Yale. Hughes and Wexler announced the creation of the commission in early August, telling a Chicago press conference that the group would "greatly alleviate" the strain of the upcoming convention by providing a "comprehensive, factual, and up-to-date reference work" which would offer "some guidelines of a somewhat permanent nature" to be of assistance in considering how to improve the party's convention and delegate selection procedures.[68]

The quickly improvised team (informally called the Hughes Commission) had its first and only formal meeting in mid-August just outside Chicago. The product of that

[67] Interview with Geoffrey Cowan (phone), 16 April 2016.
[68] William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 15; Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 20-1.

meeting and the staff's research was a report which for the first time drew together a comprehensive guide to the delegate selection practices of every state Democratic Party as well as a history of the national convention's operating procedures. The report, *The Democratic Choice*, began with a dramatic assessment of the historical conjuncture facing America's majority party: "this convention is on trial," it announced.[69] Its authors interpreted the party's recent electoral downturn not as a mere temporary aberration in Democratic strength but as the manifestation of deeper structural changes in the political environment, ranging from the emergence of issue-oriented voters and black militancy to the appearance of new communications technologies, amounting to nothing less than the "break-up of the New Deal coalition" itself.[70] These underlying processes had manifested in a crisis for the Democrats because the party was incapable of "accommodat[ing] the aspirations of emergent social forces," giving rise to "widespread cynicism" among the "many millions of voters … [who] feel themselves unrepresented by either of the … major parties in this presidential election."[71] Abuses, irregularities, and a lack of transparency had diminished popular participation in nomination process, which in turn cast doubt on the representativeness of the national convention. Referencing the Mississippi Freedom Democrats before them, the authors underscored the hypocrisy of undemocratic practices in the Democratic Party: "State systems for the selecting of delegates to the National Convention and the procedures of the Convention itself display considerably less fidelity to basic democratic principles than a nation which claims to

---

[69] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers. See also an excerpt taken from *The Democratic Choice* reprinted in *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 194-6.
[70] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers, 13.
[71] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers, 2, 14.

govern itself can safely tolerate."[72] Moreover, they argued, "the crisis of the Democratic Party [represents] a genuine crisis for democracy in America," as both parties are increasingly perceived as "parochial strongholds of narrowly based interests" and threaten to be "supplanted" by figures like George Wallace or a left-wing break from the Democrats. "With the demise of that [two-party] structure, a powerful force for stability will disappear from the fabric of American politics."[73] If the Democrats wanted to save themselves and restore the viability of the American political system, the party would have to respond quickly.

After diagnosing the magnitude of the crisis, *The Democratic Choice* went on to offer a set of proposals for party reform designed to "purify – and hopefully to preserve – the power" of the national convention as a representative political institution.[74] The authors recommended some relatively uncontroversial measures, such as selecting all convention delegates within the same calendar year of the election or allowing only those members of the DNC who had been elected the same year as the presidential election to serve as convention delegates. This, they argued, would introduce greater responsiveness to the relevant political issues concerning the electorate. Other recommendations were meant to encourage popular participation, such as providing adequate public notice of party meetings, imposing quorum provisions, and placing ceilings on the financial burdens associated with participation.

Some recommendations, however, were as aggressive as they were far reaching, such as abolishing the unit rule, drastically restricting the privilege of automatic delegate status for party officials and Democratic officeholders, reapportioning delegate allocation

---

[72] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers, 2.
[73] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers, 16.
[74] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers, 2.

according to the principle of one-person, one-vote, and substituting proportional representation of voters' presidential preferences for winner-take-all mechanisms at every stage in the delegate selection process.

In a sign of the convention disputes to come, the report also referenced the Atlantic City compromise reached at the Democratic national convention four years earlier, assuring voters that they will have "the opportunity to participate fully in Party affairs," regardless of race. *The Democratic Choice* fully endorsed such a mandate and went further, advocating the imposition of an "affirmative obligation" on state parties to encourage the "full and meaningful" participation of African Americans and shifting the burden of proof of racial discrimination to the state parties in cases where there was a gross disparity between the proportion of minority delegates and that found in the state.[75] By using the Atlantic City resolution, the national party convention, "with the accompanying power to reject delegate certification, can be the instrument that completes the racial integration of the Democratic Party."[76]

Lastly, the report concluded with an entreaty directed to the DNC to integrate these recommendations directly into the official Call to the 1972 convention, formally imposing them on state parties as national party law. Acknowledging the unprecedented assertion of national party authority this course of action required, the authors proposed a more moderate alternative: the creation of a new investigative committee modeled on the Special Equal Rights Committee that was born from the Atlantic City compromise. As we will see, in the course of events that followed, reformers managed to achieve both.

---

[75] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 17.
[76] *The Democratic Choice*, McGovern Papers, 56-7.

The Party in Crisis: Chicago

The violent crackdown of Chicago's riot police as well as the National Guard on the assembled demonstrators outside the Democratic national convention mirrored the disarray among activists, delegates, and party leaders inside the convention itself. Following the recent assassinations of Martin Luther King in April and Robert Kennedy in June, it was as much with the events inside the convention in mind as those outside in the streets that presumptive nominee Hubert Humphrey bleakly observed, "the whole environment of politics had come apart."[77] Never before had a televised party convention, which traditionally functioned as the launching pad for the nominee's general election campaign, full of pomp and circumstance, been so visibly fractious and disorderly.

The turbulent proceedings in Chicago were themselves the result of well-planned, strategically organized insurgent activity by an array of actors that collectively mounted a frontal assault on the institutional foundations of the national party.[78] The main site of struggle was within the national convention's Credentials Committee, the body that had been at the center of the MFDP challenge four years earlier in Atlantic City. Aside from its unusually high profile during MFDP controversy, the Credentials Committee was normally a fairly sleepy body concerned with routine matters of delegate certification, wrapping up their final report after only several short meetings ahead of the convention. As we have seen, credentials challenges, especially those involving racial discrimination, had traditionally been contained by party leaders and convention managers and settled behind the scenes. The 1968 convention, however, was host to an avalanche it was unprepared to manage: an unprecedented seventeen separate challenges involving fifteen

---

[77] Hubert Humphrey, quoted in David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 204.
[78] Cowan to White, Fraser Papers; Cowan Interview.

state delegations were formally filed with the Credentials Committee in the weeks prior to the opening of proceedings, adding another layer of tension to an already strained political environment.[79] The tidal wave of credentials challenges was itself partly a product of the resolution of the MFDP controversy, when the Atlantic City convention resolved to insert the antidiscrimination provision, including its prerogative to unseat noncompliant delegations, into the DNC's official Call to the 1968 Chicago convention. With that precedent set in the annals of party law and the significant increase in black (and Latino) voter registration since the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the Chicago convention saw challenges based on racial discrimination lodged from an assortment of grassroots actors against Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas.[80]

But what made the Chicago credentials fights truly unprecedented was the number of briefs filed against *northern* state delegations.[81] As expected, McCarthy partisans from Connecticut and Pennsylvania followed through with formally filing their grievances against local party abuses and irregularities, as did other insurgents in Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin. However, despite the fact that none of the plaintiffs alleged any discrimination on the basis of race, they did invoke the SERC's antidiscrimination principle asserting the right "to participate fully in Party affairs." Arguing before the Credentials Committee in marathon-long hearings

---

[79] For a comprehensive background on the 1968 credentials challenges, see John R. Schmidt and Wayne W. Whalen, "Credentials Contests at the 1968 – and 1972 – Democratic National Conventions," *Harvard Law Review* 82 (1969).

[80] The importance of the 1965 Voting Rights Act as a factor in changing the balance of power in southern Democratic parties is pointed out in the final report of the Special Equal Rights Committee, submitted to the DNC on the eve of the Chicago convention. A copy of this report can be found in the records of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, Box 12, Folder: Hearings: Special Testimony, Democratic National Committee Records, National Archives, Washington, DC. See also the excerpts from the report included in *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 197-8.

[81] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 11.

coordinated by Joseph Rauh, the assorted state challengers pointed to the SERC's concept of the right to participate as well as the Supreme Court's dictum of one-person, one-vote to make the case that the party's delegate selection procedures were undemocratic.[82]

All told, with credentials challenges coming from both North and South, the Credential Committee was asked to rule on the legitimacy of no less than 40 percent of Chicago's delegates. Having assiduously cultivated the support of party leaders and trade union officials in dozens of non-primary states, the Humphrey camp took the set of challenges seriously. While their own internal estimates reassured them that the balance of the 110-member committee was overwhelmingly weighted in their favor, Humphrey's convention managers issued a press release charging McCarthy activists with attempting to "lock out" convention delegates "on the grounds that most of them are Humphrey supporters."[83]

> Unable to convince the voters or the delegates on the issues and unable to win the nomination by accepted means, the supporters of Senator McCarthy have mounted a huge new offensive which is aimed at the Convention itself. …The McCarthy forces, by their tactics, plan to paralyze the Convention and hope to block hundreds of Humphrey delegates from exercising their right to participate. …[They] have turned to sideshow tactics in a last-ditch maneuver against majority rule.[84]

---

[82] See the coverage of the Credentials Committee hearings in *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 88, 96.

[83] Of the 105 members of the Credentials Committee appointed by the first week of August, the Humphrey team counted 78 supporters, 10 for McCarthy, and 17 "others." See Memo from John Hoving to Mondale and O'Hara re: Credentials Committee Background and Strategy, 6 August 1968, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, James O'Hara Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. See also, United Democrats for Humphrey Press Release, 18 August 1968, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, O'Hara Collection.

[84] United Democrats for Humphrey Press Release, 18 August 1968, O'Hara Collection.

In an effort to placate the challengers, Michigan representative James O'Hara, one of Humphrey's top campaign aides, suggested incorporating some language in the Credentials Committee's final report that would endorse the reformers' recommendations for dealing with "*future* delegate selection methods."[85]

> My own feeling is that something of this sort – *that looks to the future* – would be a useful addition to the [Credentials] Committee Report, but it should be done in such a way that no cloud is cast upon the representative nature of the delegations to *this* Convention. To permit such an inference would lend credence to the McCarthy claim that he is really the popular choice but may not win at the Convention because the delegates do not represent the people.[86]

Like those who negotiated the Atlantic City compromise four years earlier, Humphrey's team surmised that such a course of action could placate the challengers in the short-run while avoiding any resolution that could be politically costly at the convention.

But how could Humphrey simultaneously accept the basis of the challengers' allegations concerning the lack of democratic participation in the delegation selection process while also insisting on the representational legitimacy of the Chicago convention? Indeed, Humphrey's dilemma reflected the contradiction exposed in the proceedings of the credentials challenges themselves. As veteran political journalist Theodore White observed, what was at issue was "not so much that delegates in some states are clandestinely or mechanically selected. It is that no over-all governing principle determines the frame in which delegates are selected."[87]

---

[85] Memo from James O'Hara to Lawrence O'Brien, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, O'Hara Collection (emphasis added).

[86] O'Hara to O'Brien, O'Hara Collection (emphasis added).

[87] Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1968* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969), 312.

This was magnified by the findings of the Credentials Committee itself: in all but one case (Mississippi), the Committee voted down the challengers. Their reasoning was straightforward, if bewildering. The Call to the 1968 convention had established two grounds on which a state's delegation could be questioned and scrutinized: 1) that members of the delegation were not duly selected in accordance with state law or party rules; or 2) that delegates were certified by a state Democratic Party organization that has failed to undertake the antidiscrimination provisions established by the Special Equal Rights Commission.[88]

The problem for the challengers was that no matter how egregious some of the tactics of party exclusion had been, they did not constitute a violation of state law or party rules, especially when they did not concern an evident racial bias. This was true in Washington State, where the appointment of party officials and officeholders as automatic (and unelected) delegates by the state committee was well within their rights. And it held true for Pennsylvania, where the charge that the state delegation was "constructed from the top down" by committee appointments was not even disputed as fact, but was dismissed as irrelevant and perfectly legal by its defenders.[89] Even in the case of Georgia, where state law and party rules placed the power to appoint all delegation members in the hands of the state chairman, who in turn needed only the approval of the governor (who had appointed the state party chairman in the first place), the committee could not find legitimate grounds upon which to unseat the regular

---

[88] Background Information on Credentials Committee Hearings for the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, O'Hara Collection.

[89] Indeed, counsel for the Pennsylvania state party questioned the authority of the Credentials Committee to "nullify" existing state law, arguing that seating the insurgent delegation would constitute an illegal action. In rebuttal, the challengers condemned the law permitting such undemocratic party procedures as a "pernicious statute." However, the defense could rely on the argument that a national nominating convention was no place to dispute state laws, however "pernicious." See *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 101.

delegates. Even though the SERC's final report had called for the creation of a permanent body to investigate instances "where the party controls election machinery and procedures," Georgia's party-state did not violate party law or, necessarily, the antidiscrimination mandate.[90]

While the results of the Credentials Committee's lengthy deliberations shored up Humphrey's chances for the nomination, a second insurgent front was attacking the unit rule in hearings before the convention's Rules Committee. While the authors of *The Democratic Choice* had filed credentials challenges of their own, they singled out the Rules Committee and the unit rule as their principal target of organized action. Anne Wexler had obtained a spot on the Rules Committee and organized support among sympathetic delegates from the inside, distributing copies of *The Democratic Choice* to all Rules Committee members. They heard the testimony of Harold Hughes at their first session, beginning only several days before the convention opened. Sticking closely to the argument laid out in his commission's booklet, Hughes made the case for reform that "will help to preserve not only the good name of this Convention, but the integrity of the Democratic Party. …[I]ndeed, [it] may save the two-party system itself." This included rectifying "undemocratic aspects" of state organizations' delegate selection procedures, reapportioning voting power among state delegations at the 1972 convention to reflect Democratic electoral strength, and outlawing use of the unit rule "at this very convention."[91]

Hughes was followed by more reform partisans, including Eugene McCarthy, who had already reframed the remainder of his presidential campaign as a battle for party

---

[90] Report of the Special Equal Rights Committee, 18 August 1968, Box 12, Folder: Hearings: Special Testimony, DNC Records; *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 108-9.
[91] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 115.

reform.[92] McCarthy proposed reworking the party structure, including holding biennial party conventions, instituting a more democratically accountable DNC, and empowering the party chair to become an independent actor in presidential and congressional policy councils. Additionally, members of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) submitted a brief holding that no delegate could justifiably be bound by the unit rule. "The unit rule is undemocratic," the brief declared.[93]

> The rule prevents the minority members of a delegation from casting their votes in the convention in accordance with their preferences. To deprive a minority of its right to expression in this manner – *whether the minority is a racial one, a group of liberals in a conservative state, or simply Democrats who disagree with the majority in a state about who should be the presidential nominee* – is a patent violation of democratic principles.[94]

Like many of the arguments heard in the insurgent campaigns, *The Democratic Choice*, and the Credentials Committee, the ADA drew on the antidiscrimination precedent achieved four years earlier and expanded its reach. By blurring the distinction between racial discrimination and political marginalization, insurgents sought out grounds upon which democratic principle could be made the standard by which to assess internal party practices.

The Rules Committee engaged in several days of protracted debate and political wrangling over the legitimacy of the unit rule and the means of its abolition. Again, the typical refrain of Humphrey supporters was to recognize the problem while recommending delaying any amelioration. Frank Erwin, a DNC member and

---

[92] E.W. Kenworthy, "Senator Favors Party's Reform," *New York Times*, 12 August 1968.
[93] "The 1968 Democratic National Convention Should Abolish the Unit Rule," Box 28, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention, ADA Records.
[94] "Abolish the Unit Rule," ADA Records (emphasis added).

spokesperson for conservative Texas governor John Connally, expressed his "keen sense of outrage" at the "unfair" proposal to ban the unit rule at "this late date." He threatened that elimination of the unit rule for 1968 would "destroy any chance of unity" in the Texas Democratic Party, hurting the vice president's chances of carrying the state in the general election. Expressing incredulity at the insurgent challengers' expansive interpretation of the Atlantic City compromise, he complained that "there is a lot of loose use of the word 'minority' [here]."[95] Another Texan questioned the purported neutrality of the Hughes Commission, suggesting that its appeals to democratic principle veiled a narrow, partisan project.

> An unofficial, largely self-appointed group under the chairmanship of Governor Hughes of Iowa, composed principally of McCarthy supporters, has prepared a lengthy document embodying a long series of quite radical changes in the convention rules. Some of these changes may indeed merit careful and sympathetic consideration for the future. If made applicable at this late date to the 1968 Convention, they would seem designed expressly to *alter the outcome* of the convention by disfranchising large numbers of duly elected delegates.[96]

While only several states imposed the unit rule down to the precinct level, those that did – Texas, Missouri, and Illinois – were powerful players in elite brokerage politics (not to mention the fact that Illinois was represented by machine politician Richard Daley, and Texas's governor John Connally was a stand-in for the absent president Lyndon Johnson).

---

[95] Transcript, *Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention 1968*, 202, Box 78, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Rules and Order of Business Committee, McGovern Papers.
[96] See Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 27 (emphasis in original); and *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 97-8, 110.

In light of the discourse developing in both the Rules and Credentials Committees, internal memos show that top staffers on the Humphrey team took note of "the widespread desire for changes in overall Democratic Party rules" and suggested that "necessity might be turned into opportunity" for the vice president. Under pressure to keep the bulk of his delegates together and retain the support of the South, who already looked upon the liberal vice president with suspicion, Humphrey aides seized on the idea of an official commission to study party organization modeled on the Special Equal Rights Committee as a means of defusing the tension tearing through the convention. Such a commission, they argued, if confined only to fact-finding and nonbinding recommendations, "could anticipate all or most of the broad reforms" suggested by the McCarthy campaign or the Hughes Commission and remove major policy disagreements from "the heat of controversy over nominations." They proposed appointing prominent reformers like Wexler and Hughes as commissioners, along with many Humphrey supporters to "extend the hand of unity … [and] show that the convention will take McCarthy-McGovern complainers seriously."[97] As Max Kampelman, a chief strategist for the vice president, later confirmed,

> Our objective was to get a nominee. This [Rules Committee dispute] was unimportant, except as it might have some effect on the nomination. We said to ourselves, if you're going to *study* it, you can control it. If you get the nomination, you'll have control of the DNC. If you have the DNC, then you'll control any *study*. A study commission could be a way of harmonizing the issue. …We didn't want to do anything to upset the main job.[98]

---

[97] Memorandum to Jim Wright, John Hoving, and J. D. Williams from Ken Olson, Re: Preparations for Convention Rules Committee, 12 August 1968, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, O'Hara Collection. Senator George McGovern served as a stand-in candidate at the Chicago convention for the slain Robert Kennedy.
[98] Kampelman, quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 34 (emphasis in original).

Humphrey outlined his pro-reform position in a memo to the Rules Committee chair Illinois governor Samuel Shapiro, a Daley associate, endorsing biennial regional party conventions, expanded methods of registration and voting, a new committee on political participation, and abolition of the unit rule. However, the vice president again tried to square the circle of admitting an immediate problem while delaying its resolution: "If you want to abolish the unit rule, well and good. But let's pass a resolution here at this convention that is effective in 1972," adding "I don't want to try to abolish what I think is an undemocratic rule by [an] undemocratic procedure."[99] But after two days of debate Shapiro announced the decision to adopt a "freedom of conscience" resolution, effectively suspending, though not banning, enforcement of the unit rule for the Chicago convention.[100] In his public statement, chairman Shapiro pointed to the precedent of the 1936 abolition of the two-thirds supermajority threshold for presidential nominations as well as the MFDP compromise in Atlantic City, branding the unit rule decision as another historic advance in the "democratization of our party."[101]

At the direction of the Humphrey team, the final reports sent by the Credentials and Rules Committees for perfunctory approval on the convention floor endorsed the need for party reform *at future national conventions*. In the Credentials Committee, the

---

[99] See the excerpts of Humphrey's memo to Shapiro in *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 194.

[100] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 123-4, 125. Two days later, fifteen members of the Rules Committee officially filed a minority report contending that the suspension of the unit rule for the 1968 convention would "violate the most fundamental democratic concepts" by retroactively altering the rules that had been used in states' delegate selection processes. This caused Humphrey such consternation he regretted writing his memo to Rules chairman Shapiro endorsing reform action for the 1968 convention. The minority report for the enforcement of the unit rule in Chicago was subsequently rejected by a voice vote of the convention. See *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 131, 141; and Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey*, 359.

[101] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 141.

task of drafting the final report was handed to Philip Stern, a confidant of Hughes Commissioners Alder, Cowan, and Wexler. Stern included in the report a resolution calling for the creation of a new SERC-type special investigative commission to study the delegate selection processes in each state and make recommendations that would ensure "broader citizen participation" in the 1972 Democratic national convention. The final language spoke in broad, sweeping terms, instructing the DNC to include in its Call to the 1972 convention the encouragement that state parties ensure that all Democrats "have meaningful and timely opportunities to participate fully" in the party's delegate selection procedures. [102] Stern's party reform commission resolution, embedded within the Credentials Committee report, was passed by a convention voice vote with no objections or controversy.

Reformers on the Rules Committee, however, responded to Humphrey's co-optation and dilution of their demands with a minority report of their own. Drafted by Wexler and endorsed by thirty-three members of the Rules Committee, the report amended the Humphrey position by 1) extending the ban on the unit rule in 1972 to all stages of the delegate selection process, from the precinct level up; and 2) adding language to the official Call to the 1972 convention mandating that state parties to undertake "all feasible efforts" to "open" party procedures and guarantee that all Democrats have "a full and timely opportunity to participate" in party affairs. Congressmen Brock Adams and Donald Fraser as well as Governor Harold Hughes spoke in support of the minority report, contending "it would be a follow-through consistent with the convention's action" suspending the unit rule.[103] Hughes emphasized the larger,

---

[102] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 147, 199-200; Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 30-2.
[103] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 147.

symbolic significance of voting to end all uses of the undemocratic practice as "a step in the direction of the new politics," which will increase "grass roots participation" in the Democratic Party to levels "not seen in a hundred years."[104] The minority report passed narrowly, 1,350 to 1,206.

Conclusion

While few understood it at the time, in the hands of the New Politics reformers who served on the party reform commission created by the Chicago convention, the two resolutions of the Rules and Credentials Committee would be combined and interpreted as a mandate for sweeping alterations in the structure and operation of the Democratic Party. While many of the interests motivating the reformers bore a clear lineage with the challenges against party federalism in the 1940s, 1950s, and in 1964, this time they would have the interest *as well as the authority* to institutionalize a party of a different type. As Theodore White later reflected, whether due to "innocence or inattention, [Chicago delegates] had voted for the most fundamental change in the party's long history."[105]

---

[104] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*, 148.
[105] Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1972* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1973), 24.

CHAPTER 5

"THE CURE FOR THE ILLS OF DEMOCRACY":
OPENNESS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE CONTOURS OF PARTY
REFORM

Political parties must serve as more than just conduits by which people secure public office. They must address themselves seriously to the social problems and major issues of public policy which face our nation. But, as a first step, we must immediately open the door to all those people who are or may be inclined to use political parties to serve the ends they seek. This is what reform of the Democratic Party is all about.
    --George McGovern (1970)[1]

The purpose of party reform is to move the Democratic Party toward becoming a more accountable, responsible, and democratic party; in brief ... to transform the Democratic Party into a genuinely progressive people's party.
    --Donald Fraser (c. 1978)[2]

As the previous chapter has shown, the 1968 Democratic Party crisis was marked by the evolution of an attack on the racially exclusive practices of southern state Democratic organizations into a far-reaching indictment of the national party's undemocratic presidential nominating process. This chapter will examine the content of the reforms that followed in the wake of the 1968 party crisis. These initiatives and their astoundingly quick implementation were the combined product of circumstance and agency as party and movement actors developed dynamic relations that pushed reform forward. In the immediate aftermath of the disappointing loss in the 1968 presidential election, the question for nearly all concerned actors became not whether to reform the party, but rather on whose terms reform would proceed. Using the 1968 convention resolutions empowering the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to create two new reform

---

[1] George McGovern, "The Lessons of 1968," *Harper's Magazine*, January 1970.
[2] Transcript of Address by Congressman Donald Fraser, Box 30, Folder 14: DNC: Structure and Reform, 1969-71, Mildred Jeffrey Collection, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

commissions, New Politics reformers decisively shaped those commissions' activities, promulgating a narrative that diagnosed the party crisis in terms of barriers to participation, lack of representation, and the absence of democratic accountability. Acting with the authority of the national party, reformers developed and implemented an agenda to incorporate the social movement forces demanding entry by curtailing state party autonomy, open delegate selection procedures, and restructure national convention operations. By 1972 the combined effects of opening the party and the mobilization of new party entrants through the antiwar, feminist, and black freedom movements, as well as the labor left, resulted in a representatively transformed national party convention.

The party reforms of the 1969-72 period have been extensively researched and analyzed.[3] However, most accounts focus solely on the reforms made to the presidential nominating process, neglecting those made to the party structure.[4] While it could be argued that because the New Politics' structural reform agenda had a less lasting impact than those made to the nominating process, devoting analytical attention to the latter is justified. Such an argument, however, reads the outcome of the reform struggle back into the past, and results in a misleading and one-sided account of the New Politics movement in the Democratic Party. As will be shown below, democratizing the party was from the

---

[3] See in particular the exhaustively detailed accounts in Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983); and William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[4] Shafer's *Quiet Revolution* is characteristic in this regard, but see also, Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1978); Jean Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); James W. Ceaser, *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 86-94. For notable exceptions to this trend, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*; William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983); and Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

outset a project that intertwined the goals of "opening the party" to greater movement influence through the delegate selection process as well as *strengthening* the national party's policymaking capacities and mechanisms of accountability. Bringing both dimensions of reform into the picture makes clear that the New Politics movement was not about reform "as an end in itself."[5] Rather, New Politics advocates saw party reform and political realignment as interconnected goals that went hand in hand: party reform aimed at realignment, and realignment required reform. While the implementation of structural reform was delayed until after the 1972 convention, reformers drew up an ambitious blueprint to radically redesign the party of states' rights and replace it with a truly national mass organization. However, the decision to delay, when combined with the anti-reform backlash developing to the changes already made, fated the structural phase of party reform to confront a level of resistance it could not surmount.

No More Chicagos: Diagnosing the Crisis, Defining Reform

At first it may appear puzzling why the 1968 party crisis resulted in such major institutional alterations as soon as 1972. After all, as we have seen, in past intraparty disputes national Democratic officials and party leaders had been loath to meddle in the affairs of state organizations or undertake procedural changes that risked splitting the coalition. The 1968 party crisis proved to be different, however, not only because of the magnitude of the chaos and violence in Chicago viewed by millions of television viewers around the country, but also due to the sustained intervention of an array of organized actors who saw reform as the means to enhance their influence in the party and achieve their policy goals more generally. This coalition demanding a new politics capitalized on

---

[5] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 76.

the window of opportunity during which party leaders were eager to resolve the crisis and their opponents, particularly those in the labor leadership, were relatively disorganized.

The Party Leadership: "Unity Through Reform"

While several important developments in the aftermath of the Chicago crisis coalesced to promote the profile of reform within the party leadership, the most significant was Hubert Humphrey's narrow loss of the presidential election to Republican challenger Richard Nixon, who polled a 0.7 percent margin in the popular vote (though a 110 point margin in the Electoral College). While George Wallace's third party candidacy had pulled 13 percent of the popular vote and carried the electoral votes of the Deep South, most observers chalked up the vice president's defeat to the unresolved schism between antiwar Democrats and party regulars. In a post-election report sent to DNC chair Lawrence O'Brien, Meat Cutters Union political education director Helmuth Kern – no ally of the party insurgents – fingered the "disunity" plaguing the party as the culprit, adding that "a great share of the responsibility for this defeat goes … to those who prevented the compromise Vietnam plank in the Democratic Platform."[6] Kern was referring to a particularly bitter fight at the Chicago convention following Humphrey's official nomination, when antiwar delegates made a last ditch effort to insert a peace plank into the party platform, only to be met with intransigence from the Humphrey team, who, while privately recognizing they were "drifting badly" on the Vietnam issue, were

---

[6] Helmuth Kern, "Post-Election Observations 1968," Box 221, Folder: Postmortem, Presidential Election, 1968 (1 of 3), Lawrence O'Brien Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.

unprepared to break openly with the titular party leader, President Lyndon Johnson.[7] The repudiation sent many away from Chicago with unhealed wounds. While antiwar candidate George McGovern embraced Humphrey as the Democratic nominee, Eugene McCarthy announced that his support for the vice president was "still an open question."[8] In the interim before the general election, liberal doves in Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) had pressured Humphrey to shift on Vietnam, and even debated whether the ADA should "remain neutral" if he did not distinguish himself from his predecessor and his Republican opponent with a "*clear* and *unequivocal* policy statement" for peace in Southeast Asia.[9] While Humphrey did eventual break with LBJ in a speech at the end of September, an internal campaign survey of liberal opinion makers suggested that his belated dovishness was "too little, too late."[10]

If Humphrey had been late to embrace the Democratic left before the election and had paid the price for it, he pursued the cause of party unity with alacrity thereafter. Having already made the shift toward the dovish side of the internal party dispute over Vietnam, the project of party reform appeared to offer the most reliable means by which to draw the insurgents back into the mainstream. With the role of party leader passing to him following Johnson's departure from the White House, Humphrey publicly embraced reform as the prescription to the party's future return to power. In the first post-election

[7] Memorandum from Lawrence O'Brien to Vice President Hubert Humphrey, 10 August 1968, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, James O'Hara Collection, Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
[8] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1968), 156.
[9] Donald O. Peterson to Leon Shull, 16 September 1968, Box 28, Folder: Humphrey Campaign – 1968, Americans for Democratic Action Records, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI; Memorandum from Governor Richard Hughes to Vice President Hubert Humphrey, 29 September 1968, Box 150.G.5.2F, Folder: Vietnam Plank, August-October 1, 1968, Hubert Humphrey Papers, Minnesota History Center, Saint Paul, MN (emphasis in original).
[10] Memorandum from John Bartlow Martin to Vice President Hubert Humphrey, "Salt Lake City TV Vietnam Speech," 1 October 1968, Box 150.G.5.2F, Humphrey Papers.

issue of the official party newsletter, *The Democrat*, Humphrey published an open letter

to all Democrats, where he made reference to the important steps toward reform taken in

1964 and 1968, and argued that the path forward required "opening the party to the fullest

public participation [possible]."[11] He suggested serious consideration of some specific

proposals that had been voiced by the party insurgents in Chicago, such as a midterm

party conference in 1970, and recommended the party reposition itself as an engine of

progressive reform more generally.[12]

The consensus on reform in the party leadership was evident in other statements

printed and circulated by the Democratic National Committee in early 1969. But if the

leaders had converged on the idea of reform as a palliative for disunity, their statements

tended to downplay the seriousness of the crisis and dismiss the possibility of any

profound departure from past practices. Vice-presidential nominee Edmund Muskie, for

instance, echoed Humphrey's call for reform by reminding party members that "a viable,

responsive political party" must engage in "a constant process of reform." DNC vice

chair Geri Joseph also endorsed the reform idea, but couched her statement in timeless

generalities, saying "we all know that the party needs reform. It always has. It always

will." Lyndon Johnson, in his outgoing message as party leader, acknowledged that the

---

[11] Hubert Humphrey, "How About Yesterday?" *The Democrat*, January 1969, Box 174, Folder: DNC Meeting, 14 January 1969, O'Brien Papers.

[12] In January 1969, Humphrey also directed the DNC to revive the moribund Democratic Advisory Council as the Democratic Policy Council (DPC), which helped reintegrate the Democratic liberal-left by providing intraparty dissenters with an official space for policy discussion and debate. However, because the Vietnam War was now the responsibility of the Nixon administration, antiwar pronouncements by the DPC were uncontroversial within the Democratic leadership and served more partisan ends. The DPC continued its activity throughout the early 1970s, but without coordinating or disciplinary mechanisms linking its policy statements to Democratic public officials in Congress it amounted to little in the way of public policy. As we will see, however, it did play an important role in the formation of the 1972 Democratic platform. See DNC Memos, Box 188, Folder: Democratic Policy Council Meeting, 24 March 1971; Box 188, Folder: Democratic Governors Conference, March 1971, O'Brien Papers; as well as Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 99-102.

politics of the late 1960s had proven difficult to manage, but asserted that the Democrats should "continue acting like a majority party."[13]

The Democratic leadership's efforts to dismiss the depth of the party crisis, and therefore downplay the extent of reform required, was itself a result of their hands being tied over whether or not there would be an official reform commission at all. As we saw in the previous chapter, reform-minded insurgents inside the Chicago convention successfully crafted and passed convention resolutions instructing the DNC to create an official investigative commission to study the state delegate selection process. This mandate as well as the post-election atmosphere of defeat was interpreted as a watershed from which there was no turning back. In this context the question was who would shape the contours of the reform process.

DNC chair O'Brien, chosen by Humphrey for his ability to bridge the intraparty divide, had pushed the unity-through-reform agenda forward without much delay, waiting only several weeks after the election before announcing his plans to create two reform commissions to jointly undertake a "far-reaching organizational program … with prime emphasis on grass roots activities."[14] However, if some party leaders viewed reform as mostly a cosmetic operation, O'Brien, saddled with the institutional responsibility to rebuild a competitive national party, saw the need for more than surface level changes. As he later put it: "If a significant number of young people, women, minorities, and others alienated by traditional political institutions are actively involved in the nominating process, a revitalized and recharged Democratic Party almost surely will emerge in the general election campaign. I have no doubt that these votes – when

---

[13] See *The Democrat*, January 1969, Box 174, Folder: DNC Meeting, 14 January 1969, O'Brien Papers.
[14] Lawrence O'Brien, DNC Press Release, 24 November 1968, Box 174, Folder: DNC – News Release, Party Reorganization, O'Brien Papers.

combined with more traditional sources of Democratic strength – could spell the difference between victory and defeat in November 1972."[15] Reform, O'Brien envisioned, could be an integrative process, not only healing the wounds left over from 1968, but even extending the party's strength to new constituent groups.

While O'Brien resigned from the DNC in January of 1969, his replacement, Oklahoma senator Fred Harris (whom Humphrey had shortlisted for vice president in 1968), vowed to honor his predecessor's unity agenda by filling the commission appointments with party members committed to the reform consensus.

> The 1968 Democratic National Convention laid down a mandate for reform and modernization of party structure, delegate selection and Convention rules. …I want this to be an open party, encouraging the widest possible participation in all its decision making processes, made fully democratic. …[T]hose appointed [to the reform commissions] believe in the mandate of the Convention.[16]

Harris navigated a resolution through the DNC establishing the Commission on Rules to study and recommend reforms for national convention procedures as well as the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, which would devote itself to problems of representation and transparency in the presidential nominating process. He appointed Michigan representative James O'Hara, a Humphrey confidant very close to organized labor and a skilled parliamentarian, to chair the Rules Commission (know as the O'Hara Commission), as well as antiwar South Dakota senator George McGovern to head up the Party Structure and Delegate Selection Commission (know as the McGovern-Fraser Commission for its two chairmen).

---

[15] O'Brien, quoted in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 98-9.
[16] Chairman Fred Harris, DNC Press Release, 8 February 1969, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Formation of the Commission, O'Hara Collection.

However, while nearly all party members, public officials, and interest group representatives appointed to the official reform commissions were reformers, they were not all of a kind, nor did they envision their task in the same way. Consider several of the most prominent members. McGovern, by standing in for the late Robert Kennedy at the Chicago convention, had established himself as a leader of the movement demanding change in the Democratic Party and in American politics more generally, and, having already toyed with the idea of a future presidential run, embraced the opportunity that could satisfy both objectives. O'Hara, on the other hand, had nominated himself for the role of reform leader, sending a post-election letter to then-DNC chairman O'Brien expressing his desire to be involved with the reform commissions, saying, "it is essential that those selected be reform-minded but also that they understand convention politics and have their feet on the ground."[17] As we will see, while O'Hara judged his feet to be on the ground in comparison to what he sometimes referred to as "new left bull shit" in his personal diary, his involvement in reform came to strain his relations with the majority faction of the AFL-CIO leadership, nearly costing him reelection in 1972.[18] While McGovern would go on to lead the New Politics movement to victory in capturing the party nomination, O'Hara joined the leadership of the anti-reform Coalition for a Democratic Majority after McGovern's landslide defeat.

---

[17] James O'Hara to Lawrence O'Brien, 22 November 1968, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, O'Hara Collection.

[18] See entries for James O'Hara Diary, 17 May 1969, Box 48, Folder: O'Hara Diary April-May 1969; and 8 July 1969, Box 48, Folder: June 2 – August 6, 1969, O'Hara Collection. See also, Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 302, n. 6.

The New Politics Coalition: "Transform the Party"

While the party crisis had made the Democratic leadership at least receptive to the idea of reform as a means of intraparty reconciliation, the insurgents also saw reform as the most promising tool to prevent any recurrence of *their* experience in Chicago: marginalization at the hands of a corrupt, undemocratic system. The shared experiences of those who had been drawn into the Dump Johnson movement and the McCarthy-Kennedy campaigns had forged a distinct political consciousness among party insurgents. Despite having successfully maneuvered their calls for reform through the Chicago convention, deep-seated distrust of party officials, both reasoned and otherwise, motivated the insurgents to organize sustained pressure for meaningful implementation of the convention mandate in the wake of Chicago.[19]

Accordingly, the period of 1968-72 witnessed a flowering of pro-reform groups and organizations alongside the official party commissions, which often had overlapping memberships and an interlocking directorate of movement leaders and mid-level operatives who moved back and forth across networks. Critical to the scope and direction of the reform movement was the formation of the New Democratic Coalition (NDC) out of the existing McCarthy and Kennedy campaign infrastructure. Gathering together prominent Dump Johnson insurgents such as Allard Lowenstein and Curtis Gans, labor-oriented reformers like the United Auto Workers' Paul Schrade and Michael Harrington of the Young People's Socialist League, civil rights leaders such as Julian Bond and John Conyers, feminist activist Bella Abzug of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and Wisconsin Democratic leader Donald O. Peterson, the NDC centralized and gave coherence to the multiple and crisscrossing currents demanding a new kind of politics in

---

[19] Interview with Geoffrey Cowan (phone), 16 April 2016.

the late 1960s. In the wake of Kennedy's assassination and the routing of McCarthyites in Chicago, Schrade had written to United Auto Workers (UAW) president Walter Reuther that the NDC offered some "hope for the desperately needed reform of the Party."[20] In its Statement of Political Purpose, the NDC announced its intention to navigate a path between subordination within the Democratic Party and the impossibility of launching a successful third party. Instead they sought "to transform the Democratic Party into a means of basic change" in society by practicing "creative independence" from its officeholders. "We will not be locked into an electoral strategy based on the principle of the lesser evil," they said, nor "a strategy of loyalty to a party that betrays our deepest moral commitments."[21] While it never developed sufficient capacities for fundraising or outreach, and would eventually become little more than a letterhead organization, the NDC did provide "a meeting place for dissent within the party," and made a decisive, if short-lived, intervention in the shaping of the reform movement.[22]

The freshly minted NDC was joined in their push for reform by more traditional liberal advocacy organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which, since its alignment with the insurgent McCarthy campaign, had been host to a internal split that mirrored the widening divisions within "vital center" liberalism as a whole. What had in the 1950s and early 1960s been a relatively cohesive consensus on the New Deal at home and anticommunism abroad had by 1970 broken into polarized camps of cold war liberals on the one hand and New Politics liberals on the other, who

---

[20] Paul Schrade to Walter Reuther, 19 September 1968, Box 27, Folder 42, Jeffrey Collection.
[21] New Democratic Coalition, "Statement of Political Purpose," Box 3, Folder: National Committee Reform, DNC Records, National Archives, Washington, DC.
[22] Stephen C. Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces for Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 112. See also, Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 54; Paul R. Wieck, "The New Politics Still Lives," *The New Republic*, January 1969; Paul R. Wieck, "What Happened to the New Politics?" *The New Republic*, 28 February 1970.

sought to extend New Deal economic citizenship beyond the core of white male breadwinners and reevaluate America's cold war commitments. Within the ADA, the split developed through a significant recomposition of its membership as campus chapters swelled and many traditional vital center liberals such as John Roche, Leon Keyserling, and Gus Tyler resigned.[23] Those liberals that remained, such as John Kenneth Galbraith, Arthur Schlesinger, and Allard Lowenstein, embraced the New Politics movement. In the wake of Humphrey's defeat in November 1968, the ADA's national board members studied and debated the recommendations contained in the reform booklet *The Democratic Choice*, produced by the Hughes Commission ahead of the Chicago convention. From their perspective, "the job at hand is to take the sentiment for political and electoral reforms that has grown throughout the country and mold it into positive, constructive proposals that will afford greater access to our political system." While such a project would necessarily involve eliminating "outmoded, outdated regulations … which tend to thwart instead of encourage political participation," ADA members also recognized the need to curtail "professional power centers … to permit a flexibility [that] will encourage new ideas and foster a greater responsiveness to the needs of the people." The moment had arrived, they argued, "for liberals in each state across the country to formulate their objectives, project their viewpoints, and mount the attack for reform."[24] Accordingly, national director Leon Shull issued an "urgent" memorandum to all ADA chapters informing them of the DNC's creation of the two reform commissions and the decision of the national board "to make political and electoral reform a priority

---

[23] Wieck, "The New Politics Still Lives," 21. See also, Steven M. Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 227-8.
[24] See Henry Brown, "Orientation Paper: Political Reform," and James Loeb, "Comments on the Hughes Commission Report: 'The Democratic Choice,'" Box 28, Folder: Political Reform, 1962-1974, ADA Records.

campaign for the ADA." "*Our objective*," he emphasized, "*is a set of proposals which, if adopted, could produce a more responsive, representative, and democratic political system*."[25] Shull also sent letters directly to commission chairs McGovern and O'Hara, as well as the other commissioners, passing on to them the ADA's notes on *The Democratic Choice* and conveying the organization's support and encouragement: "I cannot think of a more important job that needs to be done in our political system."[26]

The prospect for far-reaching reform was also shaped by the core cadre of party insurgents responsible for producing *The Democratic Choice* and extracting an official commitment to party reform from the convention, who continued their organizing efforts after the events in Chicago. Beginning as early as September 1968, Thomas Alder, Geoffrey Cowan, Anne Wexler, Eli Segal, and others patched together a lobbying campaign to pressure then-DNC chair O'Brien to announce plans to create an official reform commission, no matter the outcome of the election in November. The party leadership's convergence on a "unity through reform" consensus following Humphrey's narrow loss increased the reformers' leverage to lobby for representation on the two announced commissions themselves. Newly installed DNC chair Fred Harris, arriving in January 1969, eventually approved commissioner or staff positions for Wexler and Segal, as well as for Hughes Commission members Donald Fraser, Alexander Bickel, Frederick Dutton, and Harold Hughes. Aaron Henry, leader of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in its 1964 convention challenge was also appointed, as were academic

---

[25] Memo from National Director Leon Shull to National Board and Chapters, "Political and Electoral Reform *URGENT*," (n.d. [December 1968]), Box 28, Folder: Political Reform, 1962-1974, ADA Records (emphasis in original).
[26] ADA National Director Leon Shull to McGovern, O'Hara, et al., 18 February 1969, Box 28, Folder: Political Reform, 1962-1974, ADA Records.

professionals Richard Wade, Austin Ranney, and Samuel Beer after expressing their scholarly and partisan interests in the process of Democratic Party reform.[27]

Lastly, newly developing organized groups and movement networks, appearing midway through the reform process, also devoted themselves to promoting party reform and constituted something like a para-party network. As we will see, Common Cause, the Congressional Black Caucus, the Center for Political Reform, and the National Women's Political Caucus – all formed between 1970 and 1971 – made crucial interventions in the reform process, often by creating their own party reform task forces to perform "watchdog operations" monitoring state and local compliance measures and then communicating valuable information back to the official reform commission staff. Access to and use of media outlets such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic* was supplemented with *The New Democrat*, the reform coalition's own monthly magazine launched by Stephen Schlesinger, son of the ADA's Arthur Schlesinger, which dedicated itself to providing activists with "a platform to enunciate ideas, with an arena to voice discontents, and with a bullhorn to attack old politics."[28]

Labor's Visions of Party Reform

If a vague consensus on reform congealed within the upper ranks of the official party leadership, providing a window of opportunity for reformers pushing from below, a sharply contrasting perspective took shape among key figures of the trade union leadership, who sought to close that window and return to the old ways. Those at the top

---

[27] Wexler, Segal, and Wade served in the capacity as consultants rather than formal commission members. For a complete list of all members of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, see Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 70, Table 2.1. For the members of the Rules Commission, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 32.
[28] Schlesinger, *The New Reformers*, 5.

of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), especially Committee on Political Education (COPE) director Alexander Barkan, saw a need for change in the party, but in the direction of *restricting access* of "outsider" groups.

Several important factors conditioned COPE's hostility to the New Politics reform movement. On the one hand, by the late 1960s organized labor had never been a more significant force in the Democratic Party. As we have seen, the AFL-CIO leadership had been more directly involved in the presidential nominating campaign of 1968 than ever before, urging Humphrey to enter the race after Johnson's withdrawal, and even establishing a nationwide labor committee to round up pro-Humphrey delegates in the non-primary states. Such an unprecedented effort on the part of labor for a Democratic candidate went well beyond the nominating process. While labor's mobilization for election season had been institutionalized since the New Deal, 1968 saw this party-movement relationship reach new heights. As political journalist Theodore White observed:

> The [COPE] strategy was homely and time-honored: to register working people, then get them out to vote. But the results, effort, and technique were staggering. Volunteers card-punched names of union members across the country, by state, county, and precinct. Computers in Washington digested names, spewed them out broken down by walking lists, arranged by street numbers; volunteers, trained by the Communications Workers Union, manned telephones; others rang doorbells. Appalled at the official Party's disarray, the AFL-CIO assumed responsibility for grinding out special literature and special appeals in the thirty-one black communities across the nation.
>   The dimension of the AFL-CIO effort, unprecedented in American history, can be caught only by its final summary figures: the ultimate registration, by labor's efforts, of 4.6 million voters; the printing and distribution of 55 million pamphlets and leaflets out of Washington and 60

million more from local unions; telephone banks in 638 localities, using 8,055 telephones, manned by 24,511 union men and women and their families; some 72,255 house-to-house canvassers; and, on election day, 94,457 volunteers serving as car-poolers, materials distributors, baby-sitters, poll-watchers, telephoners.[29]

Such an unprecedented effort on the part of labor had been a necessary response to the Democratic Party's own organizational atrophy.[30] Throughout the late summer and early fall of 1968 field reports from COPE and other union political operatives had poured into the AFL-CIO's Executive Council as well as the DNC decrying the "disorganization" and "financial chaos" plaguing state and local party bodies.[31] The party organizations, the reports detailed, had been found in most places to be "non-functioning, non-existent, or feuding," requiring "the political organization, abilities, and capacities of the trade union's political arm (COPE) to bear the brunt of this year's election campaign."[32] While the results of such an undertaking had been disappointed by Richard Nixon's election, Barkan reflected positively on labor's 1968 performance, calling it "the best political effort by labor since the founding of COPE" in 1955.[33] Not only had the AFL-CIO improved its technical capacity to mobilize, they had equally demonstrated their centrality to Democratic presidential prospects. As federation president George Meany put it, "after the shambles of the Democratic convention, we were all Humphrey

---

[29] Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1968* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969), 453-4.

[30] Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 190; David R. Mayhew, *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Settings, and Government Activity in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[31] Alexander E. Barkan, COPE Report of September 1968, Box 39, AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting Minutes, AFL-CIO Records, George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD.

[32] Kern, "Post-Election Observations 1968," O'Brien Papers. See also, Lawrence Steinberg of the Teamsters Union to DNC Chair Lawrence O'Brien, 13 November 1968, Box 221, Folder: Postmortem, Presidential Election, 1968 (1 of 3), O'Brien Papers; as well as David S. Broder, "COPE Director Al Barkan Flexing Labor's Big Muscle," *Washington Post*, 7 May 1968.

[33] Alexander E. Barkan, COPE Report of December 1968, Box 39, AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting Minutes, AFL-CIO Records.

had."[34] While the contours of reform were not yet clear at the outset of 1969, when it came to the prospects of reforming the party, most of the trade union leadership saw little reason for an overhaul and had never had more at stake in the outcome of such a process.

These same labor leaders, however, were in favor of a kind of reform, one that differed sharply from that held by advocates of the New Politics as well as most party leaders. A second factor conditioning COPE's hostile response to the New Politics movement was the pervasive interpretation that the party insurgents were to blame for the disastrous Chicago convention and the subsequent loss in November. In his election post-mortem, in addition to the dysfunctional regular party organization, Barkan identified "the inaction of the McCarthyites and other hold-outs" as "primarily responsible for the defeat" at the polls.[35] While this interpretation was at odds with the findings of a prominent group of political scientists, it was for many a foregone conclusion that because McCarthy had initially withheld his endorsement of Humphrey in the aftermath of Chicago, and that party insurgents were self-evidently more devoted to "issues" like ending the war in Vietnam than the electoral success of the party as such, their intransigence had paved the way for Richard Nixon to enter the White House.[36] Having gone "all out" for Humphrey in the general election, enmity for the "party wreckers" ran deep among many top labor officials.[37] Reform, in their eyes, meant rebuilding the party

---

[34] Quoted in Daniel Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 166. See also, Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 83.

[35] Barkan, COPE Report of December 1968, AFL-CIO Records.

[36] For the argument that Humphrey would have likely lost to Nixon even with the wholehearted support of McCarthy, see Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Jerrold G. Rusk, and Arthur C. Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election," *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969), cited in Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 237, n. 18.

[37] AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland, "Labor in Partisan Politics," Address at Meeting of State Federation Officers, 29 September 1982, Committee on Political Education Records (unprocessed), AFL-CIO

organization to shore up the power of the same bosses the insurgents were denouncing in Chicago. For Barkan, "the so-called political bosses were smart enough to pick candidates who could win. These 'bosses' gave us a Truman, a Stevenson, a Kennedy, a Humphrey, you name it."[38]

The pro-Humphrey labor leadership had lined up behind their candidate in Chicago to support the reform resolutions as a means to "pacify the radicals," never imagining that much of any substance would emerge from their proceedings.[39] As it became clear that meaningful change was not only desired but within reach for the "radicals," Barkan and other labor operatives moved to undermine the legitimacy of the reform project. In seeking to reunify the party, DNC chairs O'Brien and Harris eagerly solicited labor's participation in the reform process. However, when provided with a list of proposed reform commission members and staff, Barkan protested that it "was so *overloaded* with 'new politics' people" he dismissed the entire project as "stacked" and "hopeless."[40] After conferring with Meany and Steelworkers president I.W. Abel, who had been named to the McGovern-Fraser Commission, the AFL-CIO leaders agreed to withdraw from the reform proceedings altogether in hopes of depriving its findings of labor's implicit stamp of approval.[41] James O'Hara, chair of the Commission on Rules, a close ally of Barkan, and a future member of the anti-reform Coalition for a Democratic Majority, tried in vain to pull him back into the reform process, if only to mitigate the public relations problems that could develop if labor was viewed as attacking the reform

---

Records; Penn Kemble and Josh Muravchik, "The New Politics and the Democrats," *Commentary*, 1 December 1972.

[38] Al Barkan, quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 87. Adlai Stevenson, of course, was not a winning Democratic candidate, losing twice to Dwight D. Eisenhower in landslide defeats. He was, however, labor's pick.

[39] Barkan, quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 88.

[40] Barkan, quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 55 (emphasis in original).

[41] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 88.

process after having sat it out. As O'Hara recorded in his diary, he told Barkan that "the time to move in on the McGovern-Fraser Commission was before it made its recommendations rather than trying to operate on these recommendations after they were made." Barkan, however, demurred, insisting on a "hands off" approach.[42] Abel did not contribute to future commission meetings.

It is important to stress that labor was not monolithic on the issue of party reform. In fact, the reform of the Democratic Party exposed and exacerbated tectonic frictions already present within the trade union movement by the late 1960s, not only between conservative craft union leaders and their more liberal industrial counterparts, but also between established union leaders – often white middle-aged men – and their rank and file members, whose demographic shift toward young people, people of color, and women was stressing unions' representative structures to the breaking point. Any simplistic rendering of this political dynamic as a conflict between white collar reformers and blue collar unionists fails to capture how party reform was "complexly entangled" with the struggles within the labor union hierarchy.[43] While COPE's Barkan was intractably opposed to the New Politics, the UAW, who disaffiliated with the AFL-CIO in 1968 due to irreconcilable political visions for American unionism, were supportive of the reform movement from the start, becoming one of its principal supporters, promoters, and drivers through the 1970s.[44] In an autopsy on the 1968 elections, an internal UAW

---

[42] See entries of James O'Hara Diary, 8 July 1969 and 14 July 1969, Box 48, Folder: O'Hara Diary June 2–August 6, 1969, O'Hara Collection.

[43] Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986), 263. See also, Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 86-7; as well as Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008). Compare to Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*; Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*; and Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, 88-9.

[44] That the UAW was an important player in the McGovern-Fraser Commission is acknowledged by Shafer in passing (*Quiet Revolution*, 108), but without much impact on his overall thesis.

document reported the existence of "a great big new political constituency out there waiting for political parties to understand, to organize, and to weave into the organizational fabric."[45] Bill Dodds, political director of the UAW and an active participant of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, wasted no time in congratulating DNC chair O'Brien for his "practical organizing steps" in establishing the commissions so soon after the 1968 election, ensuring that something substantive would come of the convention resolutions "rather than just talk."[46] The UAW went further when Sam Fishman, director of the union's Community Action Program, publicly testified the following year that the Auto Workers "have a deep interest in and a desire to see the Democratic Party make meaningful changes that would democratize the political process and political relationships in this country."[47] While the UAW was the lone union to get behind the New Politics movement at the outset, as we will see, many unions within the AFL-CIO such as the Communication Workers, the Electrical Workers, the Machinists, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and many others would come to support it through the controversial presidential candidacy of George McGovern in 1972.

The New Politics Project: Opening the Party, Strengthening the Party

Whether meant as a positive evaluation or a criticism, the New Politics movement is often said to have "opened the party" through the reform process. While this is accurate in the sense of removing barriers to participation that many insurgents had encountered

---

[45] Quoted in Dudley W. Buffa, *Union Power and American Democracy: The UAW and the Democratic Party, 1935-72* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 226.

[46] Bill Dodds to Lawrence O'Brien, n.d., Box 181, Folder: Correspondence, McGovern Commission (2 of 3), O'Brien Papers.

[47] Testimony of Sam Fishman, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing 4/26/69, DNC Records.

through the campaigns of 1968, the phrase should not obscure the more fundamental

project at work in the New Politics movement: transforming the Democratic Party into a

programmatic, left-liberal party by going beyond the structural limitations of the New

Deal coalition. George McGovern himself underscored the connection between reform

and realignment when we told his fellow commissioners that

> the heart and soul of the political party is its philosophy, its policies, and its approach that it takes to the great issues of our domestic society. …No procedural reform can ever serve as a substitute for these essential matters of policy, philosophy, and substance. …[But] responsive, effective political procedure is the handmaiden of responsive policy formation.[48]

Reformers not only wanted to open the party for the newly mobilized social movements,

but also explicitly sought to exclude others, such as conservative southern Democrats,

from that coalition. This goal of the reform agenda is understandable in light of the long-

perceived shortcomings of an ideologically bifurcated, structurally decentralized national

party organization, which could simultaneously contain race liberals, southern

conservatives, foreign policy hawks, and liberal doves in the same coalition. In this sense,

the New Politics movement represented a crescendo in the long struggle to resolve the

contradictions of the New Deal Democratic Party.

Surveying the Grassroots

That reforming the party to transform the coalition was the main objective of the New

Politics movement is clear from the proceedings of the Commission on Party Structure

---

[48] Address of George McGovern to Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, Box 12, Folder: 14A Washington, DC 4/25/69, DNC Records.

and Delegation Selection itself.[49] The reformers wasted no time in getting to work in drawing up an ambitious agenda. With all commission members and staff finalized by March 1969, the Commission initiated a series of seventeen regional hearings by the end of April, lasting through mid-summer, to "elicit grass roots sentiment" from over 500 officeholders, interest group representatives, and members of the public who provided testimony on the issue of party reform.[50] That the Commission hearings were more likely to provide a venue for the airing of grievances rather than endorsement of the status quo was established by the DNC chair himself, when he gaveled to order the initial session in Washington, DC, with the declaration that "undemocratic processes are obvious and glaring" and must be resolved through the "all-out reform of our party."[51] Harris's bold iteration of the reform consensus among party leaders not only gave the stamp of national authority to the newly created Commission – an authority surpassing that of a merely investigative body like the Special Equal Rights Committee – but also foreshadowed the tone taken by the avalanche of criticisms and recommendations that followed in its wake.

While the Commission's regional hearings solicited unsurprising attacks on the mechanics of the presidential nominating process – the unit rule, malapportionment,

---

[49] The Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection's sibling entity, the Commission on Rules, chaired by Michigan representative James O'Hara, will receive comparatively less attention here. Its mission to modernize convention procedure was relatively more straightforward in theory and certainly less controversial in its impact because reforming the convention did not require extracting state level compliance. While it will reenter the narrative on reforming the party structure below, its internal proceedings will not. For a detailed account, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, chapter 5.

[50] Commission Staff to Commission Members, "Purpose of Hearings," 15 April 1969, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence to Commission Members, DNC Records. A full account of the range of opinions and recommendations offered at the regional hearings is, of course, beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, that the following account is representative of the hearings is confirmed by the Commission itself, in a document composed midway through the hearing schedule, summarizing its recurrent themes. See Commission Staff Memo to Commission Members, "Task Force Hearing Themes," 27 May 1969, Box 6, Folder: Subcommittees: Party Structure, DNC Records.

[51] Fred Harris, Address before the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, Box 12, Folder: 14A Washington, DC 4/25/69, DNC Records; Fred Harris, quoted in George McGovern to Commission Members, 7 March 1969, Box 1, Folder: Correspondence to Commission Members, DNC Records.

unrepresentative committees, abuses of party chairs and proxy voting – as well as the marginalization of dissent in Chicago and the party leadership's belated reversal in support for the Vietnam War, the hearings also revealed a penetrating critique of the New Deal coalition and the party structure undergirding it. Senator Harold Hughes testified that incorporating the "practical idealists of the New Politics" into the party would require more than procedural openness, but must "involve losing some of the allegiances" of the past.[52] Others pointed to the same problem of recomposing the coalition, including the Reverend Channing Phillips, who insisted that "we must discard the old mold of alliances that have proven themselves ineffective and dysfunctional."[53] The UAW's Paul Schrade put a finer point on it when he testified:

> A policy of inclusion of the party's major constituencies is in order, but there must be exclusions, too. There are certain Southern Democrats who ought to leave the party. …That's one of the problems with the old politics. …Most Southern Democrats are allowed to scab on us at the ballot box and in Congress. …[T]he old Democrats of the South must go. We must find a way to exclude people who interests are contrary to the Party's.[54]

Georgia state representative Julian Bond echoed the same point, attesting that "there will always be diversity" among Democrats, but those with "diametrically opposed" positions should not "be able to find shelter under the same umbrella." "The party has to have some kind of ideology," he insisted.[55]

---

[52] Keynote Address by Harold Hughes, New Democratic Coalition, Box 3, Folder: National Committee Reform, DNC Records.

[53] Testimony of Channing Emory Phillips, 25 April 1969, Box 12, Folder: Hearings: Special Testimony, DNC Records.

[54] Testimony of Paul Schrade, Box 16, Folder: LA Hearings 6/21/69, DNC Records.

[55] Testimony of Julian Bond, Box 16, Folder: Atlanta Hearing 6/16/69, DNC Records.

The lack of a coherent ideological consensus in the party was itself connected to the absence of any institutional mechanisms for building that consensus or enforcing programmatic coherence among elected officeholders. Veteran Kennedy advisor Theodore Sorensen criticized the national party platform as a "hodgepodge of platitudes," while a top staffer in the New Jersey UAW called the platforms "meaningless exercises in rhetoric, the primary objective of which is to hide every controversial plank under of a morass of verbiage and bombast."[56] The use of such ineffective venues of activity "further discourages participation in the party" because "after overcoming all of these obstacles and fighting through for adopting of platforms and promises … large numbers of elected public and party officials [tend] to go their own way" once in office.[57] Thomas Bradley, soon to be the first black mayor of Los Angeles, complained that "our National Platform may say one thing but you find candidates who go off in a hundred and eighty degrees different directions in too many cases."[58]

As the transcripts of Commission testimony attest, there was much more at issue than the technical aspects of delegate selection systems. By asking the question of what barriers – "legal or otherwise" – were preventing "meaningful participation" in the Democratic Party, the McGovern-Fraser Commission churned up penetrating critiques of the nature of American party politics in general, the parties' relationship to society, and the functions parties perform in the formulation of public policy.[59] Florida Democrat and commission member Leroy Collins had raised how far-reaching the Commission's

---

[56] Testimony of Theodore Sorensen and Testimony of Joel Jacobson, Director of Community Affairs, NJ UAW, Box 13, Folder: 3A New York Hearing 5/3/69, DNC Records.
[57] Testimony of Al Fishman, New Democratic Coalition, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing 4/26/69, DNC Records.
[58] Testimony of Thomas Bradley, Box 16, Folder: LA Hearings 6/21/69, DNC Records.
[59] Commission Staff to Commission Members, "Purpose of Hearings," DNC Records.

activity may go in a letter to his fellow commissioners prior to the beginning of the regional hearings.

> It seems obvious to me that we must consider all legitimate questions concerning the structure of our Party. No area should be sacrosanct. …It may well be that a new kind of structure is required to meet the needs of our time and the years beyond.[60]

The Commission was told that participation in the Democratic Party could no longer mean "just ratifying someone else's choice of a candidate," and that the very idea of a political party had to be rethought.[61] This was reflected in the testimony of William Haber, chairman of the state reform commission in Michigan, who reported that he and his fellow reformers "are not thinking of our role as … purely procedural in character."[62] Indeed, Joseph Duffey, an important figure among the Connecticut Democrats who penned *The Democratic Choice*, told the Commission, "We don't feel that the prime purpose of political parties in today's system can be to have the ability under all circumstances to win elections. …[T]he political party best functions as lobbyist for the people who are its members."[63] California Democrat Jesse Unruh (the prototype for James Q. Wilson's *Amateur Democrat*) echoed the sentiment, holding that "the time has passed where the chief function of a political party is to win elections."[64]

The idea of transforming the party into a new type of organization was most clearly explicated by members of the New Democratic Coalition (NDC), who sent

---

[60] Leroy Collins to Party Structure Subcommittee Members, 4 April 1969, Box 6, Folder: Subcommittees: Party Structure, DNC Records.
[61] Testimony of Stephen Jelin, chair of the Citizens' Caucus of Franklin Country Democratic Party, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing, 4/26/69, DNC Records.
[62] Testimony of William Haber, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing 4/26/69, DNC Records.
[63] Testimony of Joseph Duffey, Box 17, Folder: Boston Hearing 7/10/69, DNC Records.
[64] Testimony of Jesse Unruh, Box 12, Folder: Hearings: Special Testimony, DNC Records.

representatives to nearly every single commission hearing. "The party must serve the people between elections years," they asserted.

> The party, *as opposed to the candidate or the officeholder*, should be involved in issues which are vital to the people of the state. The party itself, through the state central committee, must lead the way to bring political solutions to pressing problems. The party must be concerned, in a democratic way, with issues and must act to support the principles its claims.[65]

What was needed was "a new kind of political service organization," one that was "activist" in orientation. [66] It was recommended that such a transformation be accomplished by altering the party structure to include "antipoverty boards, representatives from the grassroots poor, the black, and the brown," integrating these constituents not only as voters but as participants "in the highest levels of decision making."[67]

But if notions of participatory democracy informed many of the perceived deficiencies of Democratic Party organization, procedural openness was seen as having limits in effecting the kind of transformation many advocates of the New Politics had in mind. "Opening the door to the party may not be enough," a NDC activist warned the Commission. "If we are to develop a broad base, representing the best interests of Americans and thus winning elections, we may have to *pull* people inside."[68] Eugene O'Grady, chair of the Ohio Democratic Party, proposed that the project will "take more

---

[65] Testimony of Katherine Robinson, vice chair of the New Democratic Coalition and member of NDC National Task Force on Party Reform, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing 4/26/69, DNC Records (emphasis added).

[66] Testimony of Robert Toal, chair of Indiana New Democratic Coalition, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing 4/26/69, DNC Records.

[67] Testimony of Manuel Aragon, executive director of Economic Youth Opportunities Agency, Box 16, Folder: LA Hearings 6/21/69, DNC Records.

[68] Robinson, DNC Records (emphasis added).

than what we may do by reforming the party structure. …We've got to find something in the way of an educational system … of getting people specifically involved in politics."[69] Schrade saw such an effort as essential if a new majoritarian political project was to be launched:

> I am proposing that our new coalition develop a new politics for the Democratic Party. …In building and developing that majority, we must carry on an intensive effort of political education and community organizing. We have to go to the poor communities, to the minority communities and offer our help, not thrust it upon them, but offer our help in bringing about community organization among … those who are alienated and discontented.[70]

In sum, the McGovern-Fraser Commission's regional hearings served as a galvanizing space, where a shared vision of a reformed Democratic Party was able to take shape. That vision, while necessarily vague in its institutional design, depicted a party that was both more open to the mobilized social forces of the late 1960s but also less ideologically eclectic and decentralized, suggesting that the motives animating the New Politics movement were not primarily anti-party in nature. On the contrary, New Politics testimonials promulgated a reinvigorated role of party organization in political life, one that was "activist" in nature and not merely a passive vehicle for the filling of public office.

However, to the extent that the New Politics vision reached beyond dismantling procedural barriers to entry and pointed to the need for the party to take responsibility for educating, mobilizing, and politicizing sections of American society normally shut out of

---

[69] Eugene O'Grady, chair of the Ohio Democratic Party, Box 13, Folder: 4A Detroit Hearing, 4/26/69, DNC Records.
[70] Schrade, DNC Records.

traditional forms of politics, it foreshadowed the limits of the New Politics movement as a whole. While many of the recommendations proposed in public testimony concerned improving access to the ballot box, such as early voting, easing registration and residency requirements, precious few devoted attention to the non-political barriers such as childcare, transportation, or work schedules. Pointing to $100 to $250-a-plate party fundraisers, members of the UAW were exceptional when they asked rhetorically, "how do you give everybody in this country a chance to participate fully in American political life when it is so costly?" and "how many of the young, black, working class Democrats can afford to buy even one ticket for … one of these?"[71] That the commissioners had agreed among themselves that their reforms should function to "attract the interest and enthusiasm of the *concerned citizen*" reflects the extent to which the New Politics project was oriented toward opening the party for those already demanding access.[72] While recognizing that "the party structure cannot be reformed in a vacuum," the Commission also accepted that they were constrained practically in their ability to transform the wider sociopolitical environment.[73] This was not a bias of the reformers' own "new class," white collar elitism, but a reflection of the obstacles to transforming the organizational basis of American party politics.

---

[71] Bill Dodds, Box 12, Folder: Washington, DC 4/25/69; Joel Jacobson, Box 13, Folder: 3A New York Hearing 5/3/69, DNC Records.

[72] Commission Staff to Commission Members, "Purposes of Hearings," DNC Records.

[73] Report of the Grass Roots Participation Subcommittee to the Executive Committee of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 22 August 1969, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Democratic Party Reform, 1969, Fraser Papers.

Restricting the "Mandate for Reform": Prioritizing Delegate Selection

But if the public testimony solicited through the many commission hearings throughout the spring and summer of 1969 pointed toward a wholesale transformation of the Democratic Party, actual Commission activities quickly ran up against the limits of pursing so far-reaching a reform agenda. The McGovern-Fraser Commission's original embrace of such a broad program, including subdividing its activities between three committees specializing on delegate selection, grassroots participation, and party structure, was soon jettisoned in favor of prioritizing delegate selection reform. While the hearings had outlined a transformative vision for the New Politics in the Democratic Party, they also suggested the magnitude such an undertaking would entail, outstripping the practical capacities of the Commission, its funding, and its convention mandate. Even though most of the Commission staff members were sympathetic to the broadest interpretation of that mandate, they still recognized that biting off a more manageable subset of reforms would enhance the likelihood of success, especially because they anticipated delays in implementation. As commission consultant Richard Wade informed chairman McGovern in June, mid-way through the hearing process:

> The scope of the project is so large and the resources available to us so modest that the establishment of priorities is obviously essential to make certain that the first commitment of the commission be met this summer. …This means that the initial emphasis should be placed on informing states which are out of compliance that they must change their procedures before the next convention. Since in many states this would require a change in legislation, that information should be presented to the state chairmen early this fall.[74]

---

[74] Wade, quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 109.

By the conclusion of the public hearings in August 1969 the prioritization of delegate selection had been finalized, reabsorbing the activities of the three subcommittees into the central commission and deferring their research for later consideration (see below). After several months of analysis, debate, and deliberation, the full Commission approved a list of eighteen binding guidelines for state parties' delegate selection systems in November 1969 and distributed the final product to all state parties at the end of the year.[75] When the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection published its findings in April 1970 as *Mandate for Reform*, it framed its intervention as a response to a crisis of internal party democracy and representation. "After a lengthy examination of the structures and processes used to select delegates to the National Convention in 1968, this is our basic conclusion: meaningful participation of Democratic voters in the choice of their presidential nominee was often difficult or costly, sometimes completely illusory, and, in not a few instances, impossible."[76] The use of "secret caucuses, closed slate-making, widespread proxy voting – and a host of other procedural irregularities – were all too common," it reported.[77] The official document made positive reference to the pioneering work of the Hughes Commission and endorsed a phrase appearing in *The Democratic Choice* (originally attributed to 1928 Democratic nominee Al Smith): "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy."[78] And while the Commission had the authority of the national convention behind it, and very little

---

[75] For detailed accounts of the production of these guidelines, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*; and Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*.

[76] *Mandate for Reform*, McGovern Papers, 10. *The Report of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection* was also read in full into the *Congressional Record*, 22 September 1971, 117 (138), 1-24.

[77] *Mandate for Reform*, McGovern Papers, 21.

[78] *Mandate for Reform*, McGovern Papers, 14.

resistance was forthcoming at the time, *Mandate for Reform* concluded with a dire warning should the party resist the changes therein.

> We believe that popular control of the Democratic Party is necessary for its survival. …[O]ur Party is the only major vehicle for peaceful, progressive change in the United States. If we are not an open party; if we do not represent the demands for change, then the danger is not that people will go to the Republican Party; it is that there will no longer be a way for people committed to orderly change to fulfill their needs and desires within our traditional political system. It is that they will turn to third or fourth party politics or the anti-politics of the street.[79]

The binding guidelines that followed did not specify what form delegate selection had to take, but did outline a set of "reasonable standards" meant to guarantee all rank-and-file Democratic activists and voters a "full, meaningful, and timely opportunity to participate," which ruled out many widely used methods and practices.[80] These included some relatively uncontroversial modernizing reforms such as selecting all delegates in the same calendar year as the convention, requiring state parties to provide written rules for party procedures, and to provide adequate public notice of party meetings with uniform dates and times. Combined with the ban on proxy voting – a practice frequently abused by county party chairs in 1968 – these reforms effectively eliminated the ability of party organizations to hold the closed caucus meetings so frequently encountered by the antiwar insurgents in non-primary states.

---

[79] *Mandate for Reform*, McGovern Papers, 49.
[80] Memorandum from George McGovern to Commission Members, "Proposed Guidelines, 'Full, Meaningful, and Timely Opportunity to Participate' in Delegate Selection Process," September 1969, Box 157, Folder: Democratic National Committee – Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection 1972, McGovern Papers. For an in-depth analysis of each guideline, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 59-103; and Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 133-93. See also, Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 97-8.

The guidelines also reaffirmed the prohibition of the unit rule passed by the 1968 Chicago convention, clarifying that it was impermissible at any stage of the delegate selection process. This also banned the practice of favorite son candidates, where caucus-convention systems could award all state delegates to a nominal presidential candidate to increase the state's bargaining power with the eventual nominee. In light of the Supreme Court's 1962 *Baker v. Carr* decision, requiring a one-person, one-vote standard of legislative apportionment, the Commission sought to protect the representation of minority political views by mandating that delegates be awarded in proportion to the results of all subnational contests, so long as the presidential candidate clears a certain threshold of support. (An internal Commission disagreement over whether California's long-standing practice of a winner-take-all primary constituted a violation of the proportional representation guideline resulted in the "recommendation" that the issue be settled by the 1972 convention.) However, this required that all potential delegates competing for a seat indicate which candidate they intended to support at the convention, even if this meant specifying an "uncommitted" status. Such a provision effectively eliminated the frequent use of the delegate primary, where party members selected from a list of potential delegates without any formal statement indicating which candidate they supported.

More controversially, the guidelines stripped Democratic Party officials and officeholders of their ex-officio or automatic delegate status, which had traditionally granted them the prerogative to attend national conventions as voting delegates. While the Commission was aware of the outcry this would provoke among Democratic politicians, automatic delegate status violated all three key criteria on which the

Commission was operating: automatic delegates denied grassroots participants a "full" and "meaningful" opportunity to participate in party affairs by excluding them from a certain number of delegate spots; nor were automatic delegates selected in a "timely" fashion, as most had been elected to their official post well before the calendar year of the convention. Even aside from the absence of any convincing rationale for their retention, most of the New Politics members of the Commission and its staff saw these figures as unduly influential on convention decision making, effectively commanding delegate loyalty through disingenuous calls for party unity or promises of patronage.[81]

Moreover, while the reformers in the McGovern-Fraser Commission revoked the privileges of party and public officials to function as unelected delegates, they also drastically curtailed the authority of state party committees to fill delegate seats through committee appointment, limiting its extent to no more than 10 percent of a state delegation. This was complemented with the Commission's extension of the right to run as a delegate to anyone, effectively ending the monopoly of state and local party committees on slate-making processes. Party committees were still free to make and endorse a slate of delegates – whether they identified with a candidate or as uncommitted – but could no longer deny ballot or caucus access to other rival slates or charge them onerous filing fees.

Most controversial, however, both in terms of internal Commission deliberations as well as in terms of their long-term implications, were the affirmative action guidelines. In making their case that the party was facing a crisis of representation, the authors of *Mandate for Reform* had observed that "the delegates to the 1968 Democratic National Convention … were predominately white, male, middle-aged, and at least middle

---

[81] See Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 93.

class."[82] In response, they sought to "overcome the effects of past discrimination" by encouraging state parties to take "affirmative steps" to represent "minority groups, young people, and women in reasonable relationship to their presence in the population of the State."[83] Reflecting the roots of the New Politics reform movement in the Mississippi Freedom struggle at the 1964 Atlantic City convention, as well as the youth and women's movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the affirmative action mandate was the *clearest item* signaling the intention of the reformers to transform the Democratic Party into a vehicle for political realignment.

The combined impact of the reform package contained in *Mandate for Reform* effectively eliminated two of the most frequently used delegate selection methods – closed caucuses and delegate primaries – while placing significant limitations on a third: committee appointments. This, when added to the prohibition of automatic delegates, amounted to a dramatic weakening of the capacity of state party officials to control the nomination process. Stipulations for affirmative action for the three most mobilized social groups of the era provided a mechanism to aid activists outside the party to enter. These new party rules reflected the intention of the reformers to prevent a recurrence of their experience in 1968. As commission member Anne Wexler later reflected, "We knew all the time what this meant. We knew that we were going to change the face of American politics."[84]

---

[82] *Mandate for Reform*, McGovern Papers, 11.
[83] *Mandate for Reform*, McGovern Papers, 34.
[84] Quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 204.

The Movement-Party Dynamic: Implementing the Mandate from Above and Below

When the McGovern-Fraser Commission finalized, published, and disseminated 25,000 copies of its guidelines for delegate selection reform in the spring of 1970 (with important financial assistance from the UAW), its staff sent notice to the DNC that it was "clearly evident" that *all fifty state Democratic parties* were "substantially out of compliance" with the new rules.[85] However, by the date of their final report, just prior to the 1972 Democratic convention, the Commission could claim that the vast majority of the state organizations were in "full compliance," while the few remainders satisfied "substantial compliance."[86] In the two years between the reports, the reform package contained in *Mandate for Reform* had become party law and been implemented in all state parties. Indeed, in twenty-two instances, *state law* had needed to be altered to satisfy the reform guidelines. As radical as the guidelines produced by the Commission reformers were, what is more remarkable is the success they had in enforcing them – an undertaking, according to one prominent party scholar, "unparalleled in the history of American party politics."[87] This was the result of a confluence of forces, acting from above and below, but which converged on the assertion of national party power over its state level affiliates. While it is in one sense true that the reformers were attacking the power of regular state party officials to dominate party governance, it was more the case that reformers were attempting to empower what had always been formally the highest authority in the party: the national convention. Those who protested this transformation

---

[85] Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, "Report on Status of the States," 7 January 1971, Box 181, Folder: Correspondence, McGovern Commission (1 of 3), O'Brien Papers.
[86] *The Party Reformed: The Final Report of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection*, Box 53, Folder: Democratic Convention, July 10-13, 1972, UAW President's Office: Douglas Fraser Collection, Reuther Library. See also Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 127, Figure 1. "Substantial compliance" was defined to mean meeting all but one or two (or part of one or two) guidelines.
[87] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 105.

in party authority, as did, for example, the Illinois state chair when he "question[ed] the right of the previous convention to set the rules of the 1972 Convention," had precious few intellectual rationales to justify the old ways.[88]

At the center of the implementation phase was the McGovern-Fraser Commission itself, particularly its leaders and staff, who began issuing individually tailored reports of compliance status to state party chairs in February of 1970. Through the spring and summer, the reformers engaged in continual communication with state and local party officials, local reformers, activist organizations, as well as the national party chair. The team acted as a coordination hub for a host of interested actors operating at multiple levels of the party. The promotion of Minnesota representative Donald Fraser to the Commission chair in January 1971 to replace George McGovern, who vacated to pursue an early bid for the presidency, reinforced this dynamic. Fraser's own background in the unique Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party of his home state gave him a long-abiding interest in party reform, especially in building a strong, progressive national structure that was more than just a "pawn" of the presidential nominee.[89]

In addition to the actions of the Commission itself, the implementation and enforcement of the reform guidelines occurred at three levels, all of which interacted with and complemented the sustained activity of the McGovern-Fraser Commission. At the top level, in the Democratic National Committee, Lawrence O'Brien returned to serve as party chair, filling the vacancy left by the outgoing Fred Harris, who also departed in February of 1970 to plan an ultimately ill-fated bid for the 1972 presidential nomination.

---

[88] Quoted in Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 106.
[89] Interview with Donald Fraser and Arvonne Fraser, Minneapolis, 24 November 2014. See also the oral history interview with Donald Fraser, "Rough Draft of Tapes of Discussion Re Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection," conducted by Jim and Iric Nathanson, 9 August 1972, Box 149.G.11.10F, Folder: Draft Interview, Fraser Papers.

O'Brien, one of original architects of the "unity through reform" consensus, had not changed his tune during his short absence. In fact, on his return to the chairmanship he found the intraparty divisions to have grown "even more serious" in the interim.

> The problem encompassed far more than our loss of the 1968 election. We had lost in 1952 and 1956 and remained reasonably united. But in 1970 the bitter divisions of 1968 still existed – hawk versus dove, liberal versus conservative, reformer versus regular – and no reconciliation was in sight.[90]

In response, O'Brien doubled down on this original unity strategy, viewing a smooth, uncontroversial reform process as the most viable means of rebuilding a competitive party for 1972 and beyond. Given the imminent publication of *Mandate for Reform*, O'Brien's pragmatism and institutional responsibility led him to embrace the reform movement, becoming one of its most vocal spokespersons, despite the continual suspicion of many reform activists. Such efforts included soliciting and widely circulating the expert opinion of the party's chief counsel, former LBJ aide Joseph Califano, who concluded that the McGovern-Fraser guidelines had the binding effect of party law. The Califano memo also raised "the ultimate penalty for the failure of a State Party to comply with the requirements … is to deny seating to [their] delegation" at the 1972 convention.[91] If there was any doubt remaining about where the party chairman stood on the question of the reforms' binding status, O'Brien moved a compliant national committee in February 1971 to insert without amendment the guidelines into the preliminary Call to the 1972 Convention issued to the state organizations. These

---

[90] Lawrence O'Brien, *No Final Victories: A Life in Politics from John F. Kennedy to Watergate* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 273.
[91] Quoted in Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 255.

maneuvers created an air of inevitability to the reforms, and whittled away the grounds upon which the rule changes might be challenged.

The DNC chairman's authoritative endorsement of the findings of the McGovern-Fraser Commission not only legitimized their past activities and created additional space for reformers inside and outside the party to make subsequent interventions, but also foreclosed any chance that the party chair might act as leader and coordinator of an anti-reform movement inside the party. Ironically, the decentralized federal structure of the Democratic Party, which had been at the core of New Deal liberals' frustrations since the 1940s, now worked against the anti-New Politics forces within the party coalition. A states' rights party structure militated against the formation of any cohesive, organized resistance movement in the face of the New Politics. The undemocratic operation of the DNC – something the reformers were preparing to change – presented an unmovable obstacle for those state party chairs upset by the imposition of the new Commission guidelines from above. As O'Brien proudly announced to the DNC: "We have taken the '68 mandate and implemented it …There will be no turning back."[92] Once the chair was on board with the reforms, anti-reformers had no vehicle through which to mobilize.[93]

At the middle level, implementation of reform was overseen by "little McGovern Commissions" set up within each state party, which tailored each guideline to local conditions while coordinating their activity with the "big" Commission's chair and staff.[94] By early 1971, more than one thousand party members and officials were at work

---

[92] Lawrence O'Brien to Democratic National Committee Members, Governors, Mayors, and State Chairmen, "The Record of Democratic Party Reform and the Unfinished Agenda," 29 October 1971, Box 149.G.8.6F, Folder: Reform Comm. – Public Comments on, Fraser Papers.
[93] See Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 106; and Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 359.
[94] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 238, n. 52.

in these state reform commissions nationwide.[95] Initially, their progress had been uneven, encountering ambivalence about the reform project in many states, especially those with more highly integrated organizations, who first reacted to reports of their noncompliance with neglect, expecting the annoyance to go away.[96] While such annoyances continued to come from McGovern-Fraser staff and their state level counterparts, the critical inflection point in the reform process came with the 1970 midterm elections, which swept seventeen new Democrats, many of them self-styled reformers, into governors mansions across the country. Whether for principled or pragmatic reasons, the new crop of reform Democrats elected to office had the interest and the means to spur state and local officials to comply with the new delegate selection regulations.[97]

From the bottom, an array of pro-reform groups, networks, and organizations constituted something akin to a para-party grassroots army, assisting the implementation process as promoters, data collectors, watchdog monitors, lobbyists, courtroom plaintiffs, and outside agitators. Newly formed good government organizations such as John Gardner's Common Cause and the Center for Political Reform, founded by former McGovern-Fraser consultant Ken Bode, took an officially nonpartisan position, yet their project of promoting active citizen participation in political life dovetailed with the reforms being engineered in the Democratic Party. In February 1971, Common Cause launched a special task force to advance the twin goals of party reform and participation, appointing New Politics reformer Anne Wexler to head it. Meanwhile, the ADA

---

[95] "Report on Status of the States," O'Brien Papers. For a state-level case study of implementation, see William Cavala, "Changing the Rules Changes the Game: Party Reform and the 1972 California Delegation to the Democratic National Convention," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974).

[96] See Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 281-4; as well as Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, chapter 5; and Seth Goldstein, "Party Leaders, Power and Change," *Party Politics* 8 (2002).

[97] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 308.

announced the formation of its own special Convention Task Force to "oversee the delegate selection and Convention processes," offering to "assist in legal tests of those procedures" if necessary. As Allard Lowenstein, then-ADA national chair, wrote in a press release,

> In 1968, there was more grassroots participation in the presidential nominating process than ever before. …As a result, our party procedures were put to a severe test – which they did not pass. In too many states, the official party structures remained closed and unresponsive to increased rank-and-file participation. …American for Democratic Action has long been committed to party reform. Through our National Convention Task Force, we are undertaking an action program which we hope will speed and ensure its implementation.[98]

Others, such as the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), became involved not only in enforcing the guidelines but in their effective interpretation as well. Establishing themselves as the "political arm" of the women's movement in July 1971, founders Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Arvonne Fraser, Mildred Jeffrey, Shirley Chisholm, and Fannie Lou Hamer outlined a national strategy to "channel" the new feminism into "a political movement" that could secure "women's participation in political power."[99] They made it their first priority to "get into existing decision making positions within the parties" to influence the 1972 nominating conventions. [100] Accordingly, the NWPC created a delegate selection task force to pressure the Democratic Party to comply with the reform guidelines, especially its affirmative action

---

[98] ADA Press Release from National Chairman Allard Lowenstein, n.d., Box 28, Folder: 1972 Democratic Convention Task Force, ADA Records.

[99] Transcript of First Session of the NWPC Organizing Conference, Washington, DC, 10 July 1971, Box 1, Folder 4: Transcript of Organizing Conference, National Women's Political Caucus Records, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[100] NWPC Council Meeting Resolutions, Box 2, Folder 19: Policy Council Minutes, 22-23 October 1971 (Detroit), NWPC Records.

mandate for women's representation on state delegations. NWPC activists, they said, "should be prepared within each district to raise money … to go to the political conventions and challenge the seating of a delegation if they are not proportionally representative of women."[101]

The NWPC leadership not only began laying the groundwork for a grassroots mobilization of women into the party, they also pressed the party chair and the reform Commission to strengthen the affirmative action mandate. In October 1971, reform Commission chair Donald Fraser sent a long memo to all state party leaders, detailing what state level compliance with the affirmative action guidelines looked like, including the development of publicity, educational, and organizational campaigns "to encourage widespread participation."[102] However, after a meeting between Commission chair Fraser and members of the NWPC in November 1971, O'Brien issued at the Commission's request a notice to all party chairs, vice chairs, national committee members, and governors that the "standard" by which "full compliance" with the affirmative action mandate could be assessed at the 1972 convention would be drawn from the "reasonable relationship" language of the guideline. The missive stated:

> State parties should be on notice that whenever the proportion of women, minorities, and young people in a delegation … is less than the proportion of these groups in the total population, and the delegation is challenged on [these] grounds … such a challenge will constitute a *prima facie* showing of violation of the guidelines, and the state Democratic Party, along with

---

[101] Transcript of First Organizing Session, NWPC Records.
[102] Memo from Donald Fraser to Democratic State Party Leaders, 18 October 1971, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party; Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972-September 1973, O'Hara Collection.

the challenged delegation, has the burden of showing that the state party took full and affirmative action to achieve such representation.[103]

The strengthening of the affirmative action mandate by inserting the *prima facie* evidence clause and shifting the burden of proof to the challenged delegation would have enormous ramifications for the 1972 Democratic convention and the ongoing course of party reform. Not only would the number of formal credentials challenges skyrocket past the historic precedent set in 1968, but successful use of demographic representational mechanisms by new party entrants, when combined with the 1972 election outcome, would prove to be a potent weapon in the hands of anti-reformers, who turned to the "quota system" as a wedge to attack the reforms as undemocratic and unrepresentative amidst an atmosphere of backlash.

However, the interaction between the NWPC, the Commission, and the DNC was itself indicative of the general dynamic of the New Politics reform movement, one that flowed through and connected the multiple levels of activity that together would produce the most dramatic assertion of national party power in the name participatory democracy. George McGovern himself indicated that such a dynamic had been on the minds of some of the reform leaders when he told the readers of Stephen Schlesinger's reform magazine *The New Democrat* that "the most effective pressure incentive for party officials to act [on implementing the guidelines] would be rank-and-file pressure for elective reform. … Democratization of America's political institutions has always depended upon a grass

---

[103] Donald Fraser to Lawrence O'Brien, 29 November 1971, Box 28, Folder: Democratic Party; Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972-September 1973, O'Hara Collection (emphasis in original).

roots effort by those most directly affected."[104] When addressing public audiences about the Commission's activities McGovern was also quick to remind his fellow reform enthusiasts that "all these changes … are only reforms. They give our institutions a new and more responsive shape, but they do not guarantee new directions. The new directions will come from how we use our institutions."[105]

Nor was McGovern the only party leader to goad reform groups into action. The marital ties between Commission counselor Eli Segal and NWPC staffer Phyllis Segal, as well as between the NWPC's Arvonne Fraser and Commission chair Donald Fraser, only reinforced the overlapping goals and interests linking together the various constituent members of the reform movement. Almost immediately after the founding of the new "political arm" of the feminist movement, Donald Fraser wrote to Bella Abzug, saying "any encouragement which your organization or state affiliated groups can give to party officials to complete their reform efforts will be in our mutual interest."[106] DNC chair O'Brien, in his mission to relaunch a viable reformed party, encouraged the Democratic Women's Leadership Conference "to take full advantage of the opportunities brought about by the reform of our party," by "seek[ing] election as delegates to our national convention" and "to seek elective office and to urge those that share your interests and concerns to do the same."[107] He offered the same encouragement to a meeting of prominent African American leaders and politicians, who, he argued, "have an equal

---

[104] Senator George McGovern, "Trend for Party Reform," *The New Democrat*, June 1970, Box 157, Folder: The Democratic Party, 1970, McGovern Papers.
[105] Speech by Senator George McGovern to New York University Law School, 4 December 1970, Box 157, Folder: The Democratic Party 1972, McGovern Papers.
[106] Donald Fraser to Bella Abzug, 23 July 1971, Box 149.G.8.6F, Folder: Reform Comm. – Letters from., Fraser Papers.
[107] Lawrence O'Brien, Speech to Conferees, Box 191, Folder: Democratic Women's Leadership Conference, 6 October 1971, O'Brien Papers.

obligation with the party leadership in stimulating and urging direct participation by individual voters."[108]

These interactive movement-party dynamics that characterized the New Politics made the 1968-72 reform initiatives vastly more successful than previous efforts to challenge the structure and operation of the Democratic Party. Moreover, the tacit alliance linking together reform Democrats, pragmatic party officials, office-seeking politicians, social justice entrepreneurs, and rank-and-file movement activists helped prevent the rise of any coordinated resistance. Had the formal party apparatus, whether through the Commission or the DNC, attempted to wrangle recalcitrant state party officials alone, without the aid of a grassroots para-party network, the implementation of reform would likely have been far less effective and transformative. Instead, the transformation of the party proceeded surprisingly smoothly for most of the initial reform years, sometimes spurring sporadic acts of defiance, but never creating a national atmosphere of crisis, which could have encouraged a more widespread insurrection. As Donald Fraser told his Commission upon being installed as chair midway through the implementation phase: "there is a quiet revolution going on in the Democratic Party."[109]

Conclusion: The Belated Return to the Problem of Party Structure

While the McGovern-Fraser Commission continued to monitor and confirm state level compliance with the new delegate selection guidelines, leading reformers turned their

---

[108] Memo from Lawrence O'Brien to Mayor Richard Hatcher, "Memorandum Outlining the Implementation of Items Covered at the October 26, 1971 Meeting between the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee and Black Democratic Leaders, 15 November 1971, Box 191, Folder: Black Leaders, Mayor Richard Hatcher, 26 October 1971, O'Brien Papers.
[109] Opening Remarks of Donald Fraser, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 1971, Fraser Papers.

attention to items set aside in the making of *Mandate for Reform*. What had originally begun in 1969 as a project with three foci on delegate selection, grassroots participation, and party structure, had, under the pressure of events and limited funding, been reprioritized to the logically prior and practically most feasible task of opening the party. Now, in early 1971, with delegate selection reform more or less underway, the Commissioners used their remaining time before the body's scheduled expiration at the 1972 convention to revamp Democratic Party federalism. If this compressed window of opportunity imposed limits on developing the requisite support for such a radical proposal, the success of the delegate selection reforms *increased* the likelihood that the forthcoming national convention – composed of many new party entrants – would be amenable to a proposal for a new party structure.[110] After a letter to O'Brien in March in which Fraser communicated "we are prepared to move ahead with consideration of structural changes which we might recommend to the 1972 convention," the DNC chair readily agreed: "we have an opportunity unique in the history of this party to bring about significant changes."[111]

The supremacy of the national Democratic Party over its state level affiliates had always been implied in the reformers' concerns about grassroots participation and influence. The Special Equal Rights Committee formed in the aftermath of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge at the 1964 convention had recommended in its final report the creation of a commission on party structure "to study

---

[110] This idea is reflected in the Minutes for Commission Meeting, 28 April 1972, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: R/C – Charter 1972, Fraser Papers.

[111] Donald Fraser to Lawrence O'Brien, 17 March 1971, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 1971, Fraser Papers; Lawrence O'Brien to James O'Hara, 24 March 1971, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 1971, Fraser Papers.

the relationship between the National Democratic Party and its constituent State Democratic Parties" in order to achieve some "uniform minimum standards" that would facilitate full and equal participation in the party.[112] As we have seen, drawing the connection between participation and party structure was a frequent theme in the McGovern-Fraser regional hearings. Awareness of this connection was equally reflected in the Commission's proposed remedies and the limited effects that opening the party was likely to have. As the final report of the Grassroots Subcommittee noted:

> These hearings [have] revealed that reform goes much further than simply reforming internal structures. Making the party "open" is only a first step to reform, for even if the doors of the party are opened wider to the grass roots, it is not at all certain that the grass roots will rush in to seize the opportunity. … It is not enough to "democratize" party procedures if large numbers of people are not interested in participation.[113]

Indeed, reform commission records reveal other keen observations that the problem the commission was meant to address went beyond the operation of the party's nominating process: "The entire thrust of reformist thought stems from the premise that the trouble is primarily mechanical, and that it can therefore be cured by redesigning the mechanism. An alternative perspective holds that the trouble is not mechanical, but rather intellectual."[114]

By reconceptualizing the problem of participation, not in terms of procedural obstacles or corrupt practices but as the need to draw people in with ideas and program, the New Politics reformers had come full circle to the concerns that had animated former

---

[112] Report of the Special Equal Rights Committee, 18 August 1968, Box 12, Folder: Hearings; Special Testimony, DNC Records.
[113] Report of the Grass Roots Participation Subcommittee, Fraser Papers.
[114] Summary Memo of Party Reform Proceedings (unsigned), Box 149.C.14.2F, Folder: Miscellaneous Packet II, Fraser Papers.

DNC chair Paul Butler in his struggle for a "responsible" Democratic Party in the late 1950s. Then, as in the early 1970s, reformers confronted a party structure that militated against coherent, disciplined, and programmatic parties responsive to the great national issues of the day. Such a structure had twice cost Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson the White House in the 1950s; it had resulted in a full-blown party crisis in 1968. Thus, New Politics reformers returned to the question of responsible parties in a context more fluid and potentially more favorable than that which Butler had faced. As Fraser put it, "political parties need to be reasonable, disciplined operations even though there needs to be free entry into the party, and an opportunity for insurgency."[115]

The first detailed proposal for a reorganized national Democratic Party emerged from a joint meeting of the McGovern-Fraser and O'Hara Commissions in Washington, DC, in November 1971. Chairman O'Brien addressed the members of the joint session, giving them his blessing to "define the next reform goals," which, he said, may lead to the "historic and fundamental reshaping of the Democratic Party."[116] The session heard testimony from expert witnesses, many drawn from the two reform commissions themselves, such as Anne Wexler, Bill Dodds, Austin Ranney, Samuel Beer, and James MacGregor Burns, but also including figures like Neil Staebler, a Michigan state party official and former confidant of Butler's. The discussions addressed fundamental questions about the nature of political parties in American society, their internal structures, their role in policymaking, and the accountability of officeholders to party members. The product, a "Charter for the Democratic Party of the United States," posed

---

[115] Memo from Donald Fraser to Dave, 27 March 1972, Box 149.C.14.2F, Folder: Miscellaneous Packet II, Fraser Papers.

[116] See the transcript of the November joint meeting in Box 149.C.14.2F, Folder: Committee Meeting Notebook, Fraser Papers.

the question of "how a national party – or a national 'in-between-conventions-organization' – should be structured and what its responsibilities ought to be."[117] O'Hara and Fraser circulated the 17-page draft proposal at the end of March 1972.

The charter's stated aim was reorganize the national party so as "to permit more direct participation by members in national party policy-making" by "adding a new dimension of grassroots interest to complement that of state organizations and elected officials," and thereby "bringing new vitality to the party as a whole."[118] This was to be accomplished by introducing seven regional party organizations between the national and state levels, which would hold conferences in odd-numbered years that would bring together party officials, officeholders, and rank-and-file party members to promote organization, education, and training while also formulating policy recommendations for the national party. These meetings would feed into national policy conferences held in even-numbered years between nominating conventions, where the representatives of all party stakeholders could address issues of national policy and elect a national committee chair without the added pressure of selecting a presidential nominee. At the apex of the party, the Democratic National Committee would be recomposed to include all 310 members of the seven regional committees, while a DNC executive council of twenty-two would oversee day-to-day organizational responsibilities. The executive would include the ranking party leaders from the House and Senate, as well as the regional committee chairs, thus facilitating greater coordination between the extra-governmental and governmental wings of the party. The added expenses associated with such a

---

[117] National Democratic Party Structure, Draft Cover Letter, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party; O'Hara Rules Commission; Charter Proposal 2, O'Hara Collection.
[118] Charter Proposal, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party; O'Hara Rules Commission; Charter Proposal 2, O'Hara Collection.

revamped party structure would be partially offset by a dues-paying annual membership enrollment program, alleviating somewhat the party's fundraising reliance on "fat cat contributors."[119]

The authors of the proposed party charter foresaw the new Democratic Party functioning as "an active and creative force in American politics … which can respond intelligently to the problems and needs of modern America."[120] Their efforts thus tried to marry the twin concerns of providing greater opportunity for participation as well as producing the motivation to do so. However, as we will see, despite their efforts to frame the charter as a logical next step in the modernization of the Democratic Party, the ambitious ideas contained in the O'Hara-Fraser proposal met with stiff and, after a protracted struggle, ultimately insurmountable opposition. Its delayed formulation and rollout during an election year did it no favors; nor did the disastrous outcome of the 1972 election. Still, the charter's aim to dismantle the decentralized power structure of the party helped galvanize a formidable anti-reform backlash, concentrated against McGovern's presidential candidacy, into the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. The reforms to delegate selection had asserted national party authority over the states as never before, but it had left the states in place as the constituent units of the national party. The charter threatened the power of the state parties and their leaders in a way delegate selection restructuring did not, but both aspects of reform would come under intense attack during the anti-reform backlash.

---

[119] Fraser Interview Transcript, Fraser Papers.
[120] Charter Proposal, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party; O'Hara Rules Commission; Charter Proposal 2, O'Hara Collection.

CHAPTER 6

A "NEW CLASS" STRUGGLE?
THE STOP McGOVERN MOVEMENT
AND THE BACKLASH AGAINST REFORM

Uprooting old, entrenched customs of the past and replacing them with new and different procedures is not easy. Shifting ... to open participation by party rank-and-file members constitutes a virtual political revolution. Including large numbers of women, young people, and minorities in National Convention delegations means turning years of tradition around.
-- Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection (1972)[1]

There is too much hair and not enough cigars at this convention.
-- Unidentified AFL-CIO official (1972)[2]

As we have seen, during the initial phase of reform between 1969-72, as binding changes to state parties' delegate selection procedures were implemented and enforced from above and below, the reformers' actions seemed to spur surprisingly little organized resistance on the part of actors with vested interests in the old ways of Democratic Party governance: state party officials, elected officeholders, and labor leaders. Due to the absence of a coordinating body, such as the Democratic National Committee (DNC) chair, to help foment an anti-reform movement, as well as the incredulity of many state chairs to the prospects of radical institutional change, such resistance as was offered was tepid, sporadic, and ultimately ineffective. However, as this chapter will show, a nascent anti-reform coalition took shape during the Stop McGovern movement at the 1972 Democratic national convention, when the political effects of party reform could no longer be ignored or dismissed. Senator George McGovern's capture of the Democratic

---

[1] *The Party Reformed: The Final Report of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection*, Box 53, Folder: Democratic Convention, July 10-13, 1972, UAW President's Office: Douglas Fraser Collection, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
[2] AFL-CIO official, quoted in William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 148.

nomination was made possible by the reforms and the movements mobilized behind them. His role as a spokesperson for the New Politics helped galvanize the diffuse backlash against reform into a formidable intraparty force against his candidacy.

This was nowhere as apparent as within the official leadership of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). The labor leadership's unprecedented decision to remain neutral in the 1972 presidential contest anticipated and partly contributed to the landslide electoral defeat of McGovern in November. That decision, however, was not an action taken in defense of traditional "blue collar" Democrats against the "new class" of white collar reformers. Rather, as we will see, this "class struggle" narrative, which frames so much of the critics' scholarship, was developed by those most intractably opposed to McGovern's nomination. Their claims are, in fact, belied by the splits within labor caused by the neutrality decision – splits which did not align along a white collar-blue collar axis, but rather reflected distinct interests within the labor leadership over retaining its traditional mode of party influence through the smoke-filled backrooms of elite brokerage. As we will see, the political cleavages opened up by McGovern's candidacy came to define the contours of the second phase of the reform movement and foreshadowed its limitations.

"Come Home, America": McGovern for President

When Senator George McGovern resigned from his chairmanship of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection in January 1971 to make a run for the Democratic nomination he was judged by a well-know Las Vegas odds-maker to have no better than

a 200 to 1 shot at succeeding.[3] His time as Commission chair had not done much to raise

his public profile outside circles of concerned Democrats, party activists, or state party

officials who were compelled to acknowledge the Commission's existence. Moreover, he

faced tough competition from Eugene McCarthy, who still commanded loyal partisans

from 1968, as well as Edmund Muskie, who had been Hubert Humphrey's vice-

presidential running mate, Washington State's Senator Henry Jackson, New York

congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman to run for the Democratic

nomination, not to mention Alabama governor George Wallace, who had been persuaded

by the Nixon administration to run as a Democrat rather than an Independent as he had in

1968.[4] Before long, Humphrey would also join the race, eventually becoming one of

McGovern's fiercest critics. By the time he won the nomination in the summer of 1972,

McGovern and his team wore the "long shot" appellation with pride.[5]

McGovern's victory in the race for the Democratic nomination was facilitated by

the party reforms his Commission had designed and implemented for the delegate

selection system. They did not privilege him personally in the sense that McGovern had

"rigged the system" for his own benefit, but they did make possible an insurgent

campaign that otherwise would have been shut out, as in 1968. By disempowering the

mid-level party actors who had marginalized or excluded party insurgents from

influencing the nomination process in 1968, the McGovern-Fraser reforms had paved the

way for new entrants to reshape the party. The reform guidelines, however – even those

dealing with affirmative action – were no more than tools to be used by mobilized

---

[3] Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2007), 41.
[4] On Nixon's efforts to ensure a two-party contest in 1972, see Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*, 50.
[5] See, for instance, Gordon Weil, *The Long Shot: George McGovern Runs for President* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973).

political actors. They could offer greater access to those who wanted to participate in Democratic Party politics, but could not educate, organize, and mobilize participants on their own. Thus, McGovern's nomination was not only a product of reform, it was a product of the New Politics movement, drawing on the networks and consciousness already in formation through a process stretching back to the Mississippi Freedom Democrats and the insurgencies of McCarthy and Robert Kennedy. It was this combination of procedural reform and political insurgency that *more than doubled* the number of participants in the Democratic nomination process from 8.4 million in 1968 to 17.5 million in 1972.[6]

Additionally, the first term of President Richard Nixon had kept many of those mobilized in the late 1960s attuned to movement politics, even if the movements themselves were experiencing fatigue. Despite having run in 1968 with a secret plan to extract the United States from the war in Vietnam, the president had extended the conflict into Cambodia and Laos, igniting widespread campus protests until the Kent State shootings in May 1970. His 1968 "law and order" platform had also failed to have the promised effect, as the rate of violent crime continued to increase through 1972. Additionally, news of the burglary of DNC headquarters at the Watergate hotel that spread in the summer of 1972 implicated high-level members of the administration in a criminal scandal, which would eventually force the president from office. Meanwhile, unemployment and inflation grew steadily, while Nixon's delinking the dollar from gold in 1971 dismantled the Bretton Woods system and ushered in a period of uncertainty for international economic regulation. Whatever political capital the GOP had harvested from the Democrats' 1968 debacle had been exhausted. As Gallup polls began to show

---

[6] William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), 142.

by early 1972, the public considered the Democrats to be the party best able to cope with the challenges of the 1970s.[7]

But if the political atmosphere of the early 1970s seemed favorable for limiting Nixon to a one-term presidency, a long shot campaign like McGovern's still needed a powerful social base on which to run. At the top, many former Kennedy and McCarthy people, as well as some staff members of the reform Commission, joined McGovern's campaign operation, including Ted Van Dyk, Frank Mankiewicz, Gary Hart, Eli Segal, and Anne Wexler. Many mid-level staffers were under thirty-five years old. Richard Sterns, who had interned for the Commission, saw in the public opinion polls the opportunity to cultivate an activist base around "hostility to the war in Vietnam." "This constituency," he said, "could very well be a vehicle to give McGovern the early victories [he needs] to eventually consolidate a leading position."[8] Sterns's strategy was put to effective use in the early primary states of New Hampshire and Wisconsin, where nearly a year of quiet, face-to-face canvassing by armies of local grassroots organizers recruited by the McGovern campaign paid off in a surprise second-finish and an outright victory, respectively, launching the senator's profile as an early antiwar insurgent into the national spotlight. His frequently intoned invitation – to "Come Home, America" – began to gain traction.

The McGovern campaign ran what they called a "left-center strategy," one which strategist Gary Hart said was designed to "co-opt the left, precluding the possibility of other liberal candidates, and, at the same time, make the campaign open and acceptable to

---

[7] See Miller et al., "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election," *American Political Science Review* 70 (1976).
[8] Richard Sterns, quoted in Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*, 45.

party regulars."[9] While McGovern's long association with the antiwar movement risked casting him as a single-issue candidate, his campaign slogan, "Right from the Start," was meant to convey the only belated transformation of his most formidable liberal rival, Senator Hubert Humphrey, from a Lyndon Johnson loyalist to a critic of the Nixon administration's war policies in Southeast Asia. The McGovern campaign also developed a much wider liberal platform, including qualified support for the controversial practice of busing to achieve racial integration in public education, an ultimately ill-fated proposal for universal basic income, as well as massive cuts to the defense budget and the conversion of defense-related industries to environmental and infrastructure spending.[10] With Wallace taking the votes of most racially conservative Democrats, and Humphrey, Muskie, and Jackson splitting the center, McGovern's courting of the party left to win the nomination was only challenged by Chisholm, who, while drawing significant support from her own National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), failed to line up support of major civil rights blocs such as Black Power organizations or the newly formed Congressional Black Caucus.[11]

The reforms had also reshaped the political terrain of the nomination contest itself. Many state parties, frustrated with adjusting their caucus and convention procedures to comply with the McGovern-Fraser Commission guidelines, opted to switch to a state-run presidential primary.[12] From seventeen primaries, selecting only a minority of convention delegates in 1968, twenty-three states held primaries in 1972, which not

---

[9] Quoted in Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*, 42.

[10] For the appeal of McGovern's defense reconversion plan on suburban knowledge workers, see Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[11] On Chisholm's candidacy, see Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*, 219.

[12] Jeffrey S. Walz and John Comer, "State Responses to National Democratic Party Reform," *Political Research Quarterly* 52 (1999).

only elected over 50 percent of convention delegates but, with one exception, bound them to cast their convention ballots proportionally according to the outcome of those contests. However, the greater number of primaries was not the exclusive source of the great swell in participation witnessed that year. While the total amount of primary voters more than doubled between 1968 and 1972, caucus-goers rose by over 250 percent in the same period.[13] In fact, McGovern performed best in non-primary states, where his enthusiastic supporters had the superior grassroots organization to out-mobilize his rivals in the Democratic caucuses. There is evidence to suggest that this may have been an additional factor motivating state party officials to switch from caucuses to primaries: to dilute the influence of McGovernites in the reformed nomination process. In the words of Geri Joseph, former vice chair of the DNC, "Many who opposed [reform] and didn't know how to express themselves said, 'We can't possible do this. We'll just have a primary. What can be more democratic than that?'"[14]

Ironically, however, McGovern's victory over his Democratic rivals ultimately came down to the final contest in California, whose traditional winner-take-all primary had been a source of such contention in the McGovern-Fraser Commission proceedings that the final decision regarding its status had been deferred to the 1972 convention. The outcome of that primary – 44 percent for McGovern, 39 percent for Humphrey – gave all 271 California delegates to McGovern, putting him over the threshold for the nomination. Had proportional representation been in effect as the Commission guidelines had required in all other states, neither McGovern nor Humphrey would have arrived at the 1972

---

[13] The raw numbers, rounded to the nearest thousand, for 1972 are 16,715,000 for primaries, 771,000 for caucuses. See Crotty, *Party Reform*, 142.

[14] Quoted in Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983), 312. See also, Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 376, n. 46.

convention as the presumptive nominee. But while McGovernites celebrated their victory, Humphrey stayed in the race, determined to bring his fight for the nomination into the convention. As we will see, the challenge against the California results would become a focal issue in the Stop McGovern movement at the convention.

The Old Politics in the New Party

While McGovern's campaign followed a familiar path to that of McCarthy and Kennedy in 1968, the effects were dramatically different. With new delegate selection rules in place, early commanding victories in state primaries were no longer meant to simply demonstrate the candidate's electability to powerful party powerbrokers. Rather, with proportional representation of candidate strength (except in California) among pledged delegates, presidential aspirants accumulated convention support through primaries and caucuses where party voters cast their ballot for their preferred candidate. State and local party organizations had no choice but to facilitate this process, one which they could no longer control.

That the new system held important ramifications for traditional methods of party governance and coalition building was not lost on party stakeholders. While the top officials of the AFL-CIO preferred to respond to this changed environment by informally boycotting the reform process itself, DNC chair Lawrence O'Brien did not let the issue rest. As DNC records demonstrate, O'Brien and his staff were at pains to pull labor into the reformed nominating system, repeatedly soliciting their input and participation to help them adapt to the new rules. As one report to the chair read:

The extent of the understanding of the impact of these facts [delegate selection reforms] and the timetable is quite limited. …Most of the labor movement has ignored the process and with notable exceptions has not participated in the decision steps. *This is a luxury that neither the labor movement nor the Democratic Party can afford.* If substantial involvement by state labor leadership, working down into the lower levels of the party, and … union leadership at the national level is not evident in the weeks immediately ahead, there is a serious question as to the ability of the labor movement to influence and affect the selection of the party's nominee in 1972.[15]

For O'Brien and others at the DNC, the belief that reform would restore unity to the Democratic Party was at risk of faltering on account of labor's unwillingness to embrace the reforms and get involved in delegate selection early. They recognized that "trade unions are the most stable elements" in the coalition. "It is essential that the leadership of the trade union movement understand and be involved in such critical activities as *implementation of party delegate selection reform, selection of delegates to the convention,* and avoiding the kind of self-defeating episodes we had at the Chicago Convention."[16]

However, when the DNC's warnings to labor that the rules of the political game were changing were met with more than just silence, they were accompanied by vitriolic attacks on the reformers and pressure to roll back the clock on the reform project altogether. In one such meeting with George Meany, O'Brien told the AFL-CIO president,

---

[15] Memo from Bill Welsh to Lawrence O'Brien, "The Labor Movement and the Reform Activities of the State Democratic Parties," 9 December 1970, Box 225, Folder: Labor 1970, Lawrence O'Brien Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA (emphasis added).
[16] Memo from Bill Welsh to Lawrence O'Brien, 20 September 1971, Box 235, Folder: Labor 1971 (1 of 2), O'Brien Papers (emphasis in original).

> The rules have been adopted. …It's too late to debate whether they're good or bad. You have your people well organized all over the country. You should study the new rules and use them to your advantage, just like everyone else.[17]

As he later reflected in his memoir, requests that he use his authority as party chair to somehow mitigate the effect of the new rules "wasn't what I had been working toward for a year and a half." "The people who wanted to stop McGovern," he continued, "could have stopped him in the primaries, if they had planned their strategies more intelligently. I certainly had no intention of pulling their chestnuts out of the fire."[18]

But for all of O'Brien's pleading with the labor leadership to adapt to the new institutional conditions produced by the reform movement, no amount of intelligent planning by the officials at the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) could have overcome the historic limitations of the trade union movement in such a short timespan. As we have seen, the nature of labor's integration into the national Democratic Party's system of elite brokerage placed its greatest source of leverage in the smoke-filled backrooms of the convention hall, where presidential nominees had to meet the approval of top union officials in order for labor's organizational muscle to be put to work on the party's behalf during the election. This institutional arrangement only reinforced American labor's incapacity to effectively engage its mass membership in political education. While they could perform valuable services in terms of voter registration and turnout – and not only for union members – unions had little ability to affect workers' hearts and minds. Yet this was precisely the imperative the newly reformed nominating system imposed on them. With their powerbroker role effectively abolished, labor would

---

[17] Lawrence O'Brien, *No Final Victories: A Life in Politics from John F. Kennedy to Watergate* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), 296.
[18] O'Brien, *No Final Victories*, 297.

have to mobilize its members not only to participate in primaries and caucuses but to cast their ballots for the leadership's preferred candidate. As the surprising surge in union members' support for George Wallace's racial populism had painful reminded AFL-CIO and UAW officials in 1964, 1968, and again in 1972, this was not a degree of influence labor officials were used to or adept at exerting.

The new system also meant taking the risk of publicly supporting a candidate, as COPE did in 1972 with Henry Jackson, who failed to survive the primary process. This put labor in a strategic conundrum: either they could transfer their support from the loser to the winner after the fact, which could relegate them to the bottom of the candidate's coalition; or, hypothetically, labor could remain uninvolved during the primary process until a de facto nominee emerged. However, the latter option left open the possibility that the nominee could be indifferent or even hostile to labor's interests, and, even in the best case scenario, would implicitly confirm that labor's support was irrelevant for capturing the Democratic nomination.

Meany and COPE did make a rather belated effort to back Washington senator Henry Jackson, known for his pro-labor record and his hawkish anticommunism, in the primaries. When his campaign fizzled, AFL-CIO leaders attempted in vain to regain some brokerage power at the convention by running "uncommitted" slates of pro-labor delegates in state primaries. But in a political moment when it appeared to many observers that the presidential campaign was becoming a proxy war for the soul of the Democratic Party such tactics "never worked anywhere," according to secretary-treasurer

Lane Kirkland.[19] Labor, due primarily to its own actions and inactions over the course of its history of political involvement, found itself in an impossible position. With its veto power over the Democratic candidate removed by the reformers, its influence in the Democratic Party appeared to evaporate after seeming, in 1968, to be reaching new heights.

The Labor-Left and the New Politics

But if labor's role in Democratic Party politics had been forcibly altered by the reform movement, this was a development not everyone in the labor leadership greeted with hostility. Indeed, some large industrial, service, and public sector unions viewed the new participatory nomination system as offering them their own window of opportunity to gain greater influence in party affairs. Historically subordinated to the dominance of Meany's conservative ex-AFL wing of the federation, which also held authority over COPE and the AFL-CIO's legislative activity, was the American Federation of State, Country, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); the Machinists; the Clothing and Textile Workers; the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers; the Communication Workers (CWA); and the United Farm Workers – all of whom not only held less of a stake in the old brokerage relationship with the Democratic Party leadership but also had larger, more diverse memberships that more closely resembled the New Politics than did the memberships of the craft unions. When combined with those industrial and public service unions outside the AFL-CIO, such as the UAW, the National Education Association, and the United Electrical Workers, it seemed the New Politics reform movement had a

---

[19] Remarks of AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland at Meeting of State Federation Officers, 29 September 1982, "Labor in Partisan Politics," COPE Files (unprocessed), AFL-CIO Records, George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD.

potentially powerful ally in very important parts of the labor movement, George Meany notwithstanding.[20]

In fact, the hostile actions taken by Meany in response to the New Politics movement threatened to transform labor's nascent fissures into profound splits. At the AFL-CIO president's invitation, Senator Henry Jackson delivered his anti-New Politics stump speech before the federation's Executive Council in August 1970. From the podium, Jackson – whose advisor Ben Wattenberg would lead the anti-reform Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM) after the election – denounced "the intellectual elite" and the "silk stocking liberals" who were "trying to use 'party reform' as a device to take over the party."[21] AFL-CIO Executive Council member and president of AFSCME, Jerry Wurf, who, following the death of the UAW's Walter Reuther in May 1970 had assumed the leadership of the labor-left, communicated to DNC chair O'Brien his "concern with the comments on 'extremists' in the Democratic Party" that were being spread through labor's highest councils. "Meany is so hung up on the war," Wurf reported, "that he would, if he could, try and seal a Nixon endorsement in 1972." Top Democratic officials concluded among themselves that "there is very real resentment" against Meany within the house of labor.[22]

However, the tensions potentially cleaving the trade union leadership were not about the Vietnam War as such, nor even the reform of the Democratic Party. While it is true that few were as virulently anticommunist as George Meany or his ex-Communist director of International Affairs Jay Lovestone (who had ties with the CIA), what truly

---

[20] Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 65-6.
[21] Address of Senator Henry Jackson, 3-5 August 1970, Box 40, Minutes of the AFL-CIO Executive Council Meetings, AFL-CIO Records.
[22] Quoted in Memo from Bill Welsh to Lawrence O'Brien, 11 September 1970, Box 225, Folder: Labor 1970, O'Brien Papers.

fueled the resentments of Wurf and other liberal labor leaders in the AFL-CIO was its undemocratic – almost autocratic – system of governance. Unwavering commitment to the war in Vietnam, even under an anti-labor Republican administration, was indicative of a pattern of decisionmaking that since 1955 had vested almost total authority in the now 77-year-old Meany and his top lieutenants. "Unilateral positions [are] taken without consultation," Wurf later told *The New Republic*.[23] By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as union density began falling from its postwar high, many, especially those on the margins of the trade union hierarchy, had come to see such unilateralism as a growing liability for the fate of American unionism as a whole. It had been Meany's failure to launch what the late Walter Reuther had described as "a comprehensive program to modernize and revitalize the AFL-CIO and make it into an effective instrument for creative and constructive social change" that had motivated the UAW president to disaffiliate from the labor federation in 1968.[24] Reuther's protest, however, had fallen on deaf ears. For example, when Meany was asked during a 1972 interview about the state of the labor movement, he answered, "I don't know. I don't care." When asked if the AFL-CIO should organize the unorganized, Meany asked, "*why should we worry about organizing groups of people who do not appear to want to be organized?*"[25]

Party reform, therefore, represented to some unions more than a chance to break the old cold war political mold or embrace a more open Democratic Party as a matter of principle. Reform presented an opportunity to refashion the labor-liberal alliance and shift the balance of power within the union hierarchy itself. As one cautionary note sent

---

[23] Paul R. Wieck, "Some COPE, Some Don't: Labor and the Democrats," *The New Republic*, 30 June 1973.
[24] See the letter from Walter Reuther to George Meany, 2 March 1968, March 1968 Meeting, Box 39, Minutes of the AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting, AFL-CIO Records.
[25] Quoted in B.J. Widick, "George Meany's Last Hurrah," *The Nation*, 4 September 1972 (emphasis in original).

from the vice president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, Howard Samuels, to COPE's director Al Barkan put it: if the union leadership continues to lump together the "nuts and kooks" (as Barkan often labeled the New Politics) with "legitimate reform elements (or women, blacks, youth)," then "labor will become the symbol of the status quo and the enemy of legitimate reform or minority or youth aspirations."[26] As we will see, many labor leaders were keen to avoid this.

The Convention Turned Upside Down

The impact of the delegate selection reforms was visibly on display at the 1972 Democratic national convention, convened in Miami Beach in July. Due to the strengthened affirmative action guidelines pushed by the National Women's Political Caucus as well as the use of such rules by the mobilized social forces entering the party's nomination process through the McGovern candidacy, "the complexion of Democratic politics had changed" – indeed, one veteran journalist called it a "rupture."[27] As shown in Figure 6.1 below, when compared with the 1968 convention in Chicago, women delegates had increased their proportion of seats from 13 to 40 percent; African American delegates had increased from 7 to 15 percent; and people under the age of thirty had increased from 4 to 22 percent. Additionally, those with annual incomes of less than $10,000 a year (70 percent of the country according to the 1970 census) increased from 13 to 27 percent. An unprecedented 83 percent of convention participants were attending their first convention, compared to 67 percent in 1968. There could be little doubt that

---

[26] Memo from Howard D. Samuels to Al Barkan, 22 February 1971, Box 235, Folder: Labor 1971 (2 of 2), O'Brien Papers.

[27] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 105; Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1972* (Atheneum Books, 1973), 209.

"compared to the total population, the 1972 convention was in most respects more representative than was the 1968 convention."[28]

FIGURE 6.1: Proportion of Women, African Americans, and Youth Delegates at Democratic National Conventions, 1968 and 1972
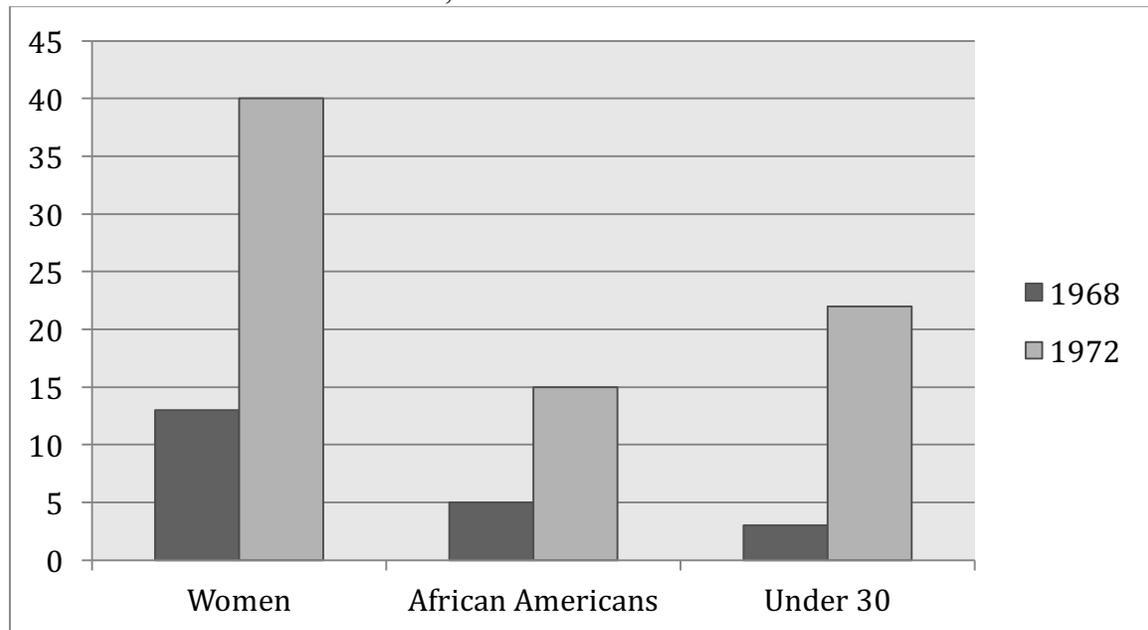
Source: CBS News Report, "The Delegates of '72," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973-November 1974, O'Hara Collection.

While there were many new faces populating the convention in Miami Beach, there were conspicuous absences as well. Despite the increase in the aggregate number of Democrats in the House, the Senate, and in governors mansions across the United States over the initial phase of party reform, the proportion of these attending the national convention fell dramatically. As shown in Table 6.1 below, the number of Democratic governors attending national conventions across this period declined significantly, falling

---

[28] John W. Soule and Wilma E. McGrath, "A Comparative Study of Presidential Nomination Conventions: The Democrats 1968 and 1972," *American Journal of Political Science* 19 (1975), 502. These figures are taken from a CBS News Report, "The Delegates of '72," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973-November 1974, James O'Hara Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. For verification using DNC data, see Crotty, *Party Reform*, 129, 131.

from an attendance rate of 88 percent in 1968 to 53 percent in 1972. Senators' fall in the rate of attendance was even more pronounced, from nearly 63 percent in 1968 to 28 percent in 1972. And members of the Democratic House Caucus, while never attending conventions in high proportions, dropped precipitously from 31.5 percent in 1968 to a mere 12 percent in 1972.

TABLE 6.1: Number of Party Officeholders In Office and Attending Democratic National Conventions, 1968 and 1972

	In Office 1968	Chicago 1968	In Office 1972	Miami 1972
Governors	26	23	30	16
Senators	62	39	54	15
Representatives	247	78	255	31

Source: CBS News Report, "The Delegates of '72," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973-November 1974, O'Hara Collection; Crotty, *Party Reform*, 136.

The McGovern-Fraser Commission's abolition of automatic delegate status for party officials and public officeholders had required those who used to enjoy the prerogative of being an uncommitted voting delegate at the national convention, and very often a leading figure within their state delegation, to declare their preferred candidate (or at least declare themselves "uncommitted"), compete for a delegate seat in their state's primary or convention, and vote accordingly if selected to be that candidate's supporter at the convention. Whether due to the embarrassment of having to compete against rank-and-file party activists for a position many felt they were entitled to by right of office or, as happened in several cases, having lost in such a competition, top Democratic officials

attended the 1972 convention in much smaller numbers than ever before.[29] Without the guarantee of influence or the freedom to maneuver, some party leaders found few compelling reasons to participate at all. "I do not plan to go," reported Boston Mayor Kevin White. "There is nothing for me to do there."[30]

This is not to say, as many anti-reformers later charged in their effort to reinstate automatic delegate status, that Democratic public and party officials had been excluded from the reformed party convention. In fact, there were many party officials and officeholders at the 1972 national convention: almost 20 percent of the delegates in Miami Beach held public office at the time; another 6 percent had held public office in the past; and 38 percent held some party office aside from serving as a delegate.[31] The difference, however, was that they were *lower ranking public officials and party members*, who had not usually been extended automatic delegate status in the past. Moreover, the lower ranks of the Democratic Party were less likely than their top-ranking Washington counterparts to be white men and may well have benefited from the affirmative action guidelines of the reforms.[32]

Also in contrast to the charges of reform opponents was the fact that union members *dramatically increased* their proportion of delegate seats from 4 to 16 percent between 1968 and 1972. According to the available estimates, including COPE's, labor had somewhere been 300 and 488 delegates in Miami Beach.[33] The number of union

---

[29] CBS News Report, "The Delegates of '72," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973-November 1974, O'Hara Collection; Crotty, *Party Reform*, 136.
[30] John Herbers, "Hearings on the Platform Set the Stage," *New York Times*, 10 June 1972.
[31] CBS News Report, "The Delegates of '72," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973-November 1974, O'Hara Collection.
[32] Crotty, *Party Reform*, 99, 135.
[33] See CBS News Report, "The Delegates of '72," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973-November 1974, O'Hara Collection; as well as Memo from Dick

officials – 145 – had increased as well.[34] DNC memos indicate that convention planners provided union officials with more box seats and floor passes than even the presidential candidates were allotted, a direct phone line linking Meany's hotel suite with chairman O'Brien's, and premium hotel accommodations next door to top party leaders.[35] However, despite the privileges accorded to top trade union officials and the large number of attendees carrying union cards, labor faced a transformed political institution where its former channels of influence in the smoke-filled backrooms of the convention hall no longer existed. The increase in the number of trade union delegates had more to do with their partisan attachments to the presidential candidates – Humphrey and McGovern especially – than their union affiliations. Thus, while the open delegate selection rules and the fiercely combative nomination contest had drawn far greater numbers of union members into the party, they were creatures of the candidates rather than the labor bosses. As Robert Keefe, political consultant for the AFL-CIO, put it: "Labor had more delegates and less influence than ever before."[36]

The New Politics of National Party Governance

The changes made to the party's delegate selection process by the McGovern-Fraser Commission, and their attendant effects on the composition of the convention, were complemented by the work of the less prominent Commission on Rules, which during the same period promulgated fairly uncontroversial guidelines for modernizing the

---

Murphy to Lawrence O'Brien, "Labor and the Democratic National Convention," Box 240, Folder: Labor 1972, O'Brien Papers.
[34] Crotty, *Party Reform*, 136, Table 12.7.
[35] Murphy to O'Brien, O'Brien Papers.
[36] Quoted in David S. Broder, "Labor Exerting New Muscle in Democratic Party," *Washington Post*, 2 September 1973.

Democratic national conventions. Chaired by Michigan congressman James O'Hara, the Rules Commission altered 150 years of party tradition by codifying permanent rules for convention procedures, many of which were meant to prevent the chaos that had attended the 1968 convention in Chicago. In addition to introducing greater transparency and stability to convention operations, the O'Hara Commission sought to enhance the representativeness of the convention by revising state delegate allocation from the Electoral College to a mixed formula that reflected population and Democratic Party strength, diminishing the number of delegates apportioned to southern and rural states. The O'Hara Commission also applied similar changes to convention governance by restructuring the three standing convention committees – the Credentials Committee, the Platform Committee, and the Rules Committee – to no longer reflect equal voice between the states but rather to reflect the size of each state's delegation. All three committees were enlarged from 110 to 150 members, requiring equal division between men and women. While all states were entitled to at least one seat on each of the three committees, smaller states' influence was diminished in favor of the more populous, reliably Democratic states. All committee members had to be elected by their fellow state delegates rather than appointed by political bosses, and committee deliberations had to begin well in advance of the opening of the convention and transmit their deliberations and reports to all convention attendees upon conclusion.

The Credentials Committee and the Stop McGovern Coalition

In the context of the mobilization of so many new party entrants in the 1972 presidential campaign, the O'Hara Commission reforms facilitated the integration and representation

of the new social forces while avoiding any repeat of the catastrophe in Chicago. This was especially true of the Credentials Committee, which, while overloaded with a record-breaking seventeen credentials challenges involving fifteen state delegations in 1968, saw in 1972 an astounding 118 challenges involving thirty-one states. Just as the 1964 compromise of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge in Atlantic City had provided the grounds upon which party insurgents launched a more far-reaching set of challenges in 1968, so had the McGovern-Fraser guidelines, especially those concerning the representation of women, racial minorities, and young people in "reasonable relationship" to their presence in the state, paved the way for new party activists to mount new challenges. As the final report of the Credentials Committee acknowledged, "because in 1972 our reform is unprecedented in American political history, our credentials contests are likewise unprecedented."[37] While many initial challenges were withdrawn or settled without significant dispute in the weeks before the official commencement of the Credential Committee hearings in June, several of the remaining twenty-eight cases constituted a showdown between the reformers and their opponents over the most controversial aspects of reform. Of the remaining challenges, 80 percent dealt with the affirmative action guidelines.[38] While most were decided in favor of the reformers, often by topping up state delegations with more women, minority, or youth activists, several cases became fraught with political tension.[39]

The labor leaders most aggrieved by the party reforms and McGovern's candidacy converged on the Credentials Committee as the first front in the Stop

---

[37] *The Official Proceedings of the 1972 Democratic National Convention*, eds, Sheila Hixon and Ruth Rose (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1972), 154.

[38] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 138.

[39] For a state by state breakdown of the credentials challenges and their resolutions, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 140-2, Tables 4.2 and 4.3.

McGovern movement. COPE's Al Barkan had already put his weight behind a lobbying operation for the selection of former Howard University law school dean Patricia Roberts Harris as chair of the Committee. While she was a relatively unknown entity, she was in his eyes infinitely more preferable to the passionate New Politics reformer Harold Hughes, vice chair of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, who had also nominated himself for the position. After leaning on many DNC members, Barkan's preference for Credentials Committee chair prevailed.[40] AFL-CIO political consultant and executive director of the DNC Robert Keefe also ran a behind the scenes lobbying campaign to get anti-McGovern delegates elected to the Credentials Committee. This was most effectively pulled off in states such as Minnesota, Ohio, and Texas, where McGovern had polled very low levels of support in the primaries and caucuses. Inside the Credentials Committee hearings the Stop McGovern forces, led by the AFL-CIO but including Humphrey, Jackson, Muskie, and Wallace supporters, focused the bulk of their energies on the controversial case of California.

Ironically, the Stop McGovern coalition modeled itself as being more consistent with the reforms than the reformers, filing a credentials challenge alleging the use of the banned unit rule, binding all delegates to cast their votes with the majority, in the state's winner-take-all primary. How could McGovern claim all 271 delegates when he only won 44 percent of the primary votes? Since the McGovern-Fraser Commission had come to a stalemate on the question of California's primary and had explicitly deferred how to resolve it until the 1972 convention, the results of the California primary were in line with party and state law. However, new convention rules required that delegates whose credentials were in question could not vote on their own case. With the ten California

---

[40] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 438.

representatives having recused themselves, the Stop McGovern forces held the balance of power on the Credentials Committee, and the majority ruled to overturn the California results 72-66, redistributing the delegates proportionally among the candidates.

The Credentials Committee decision temporarily threw McGovern's nomination into doubt. Without all 271 California delegates, McGovern would not reach the majority threshold necessary on the first ballot, potentially unbinding his delegates to shift their support to Humphrey. McGovernites on the Credentials Committee retaliated the next day by organizing a majority of 71-61 to invalidate the credentials of Richard Daley's Illinois delegation for failing to comply with the guidelines against closed slate making as well as adequate representation for women, minorities, and youth. Daley's fifty-eight delegates were replaced by a rival delegation led by Jesse Jackson. In the case of California, McGovern filed a lawsuit with the US Court of Appeals, which reinstated the results of the winner-take-all primary. Subsequently, however, in an emergency session the US Supreme Court struck down the appellate court decision 6-3 only days before the convention began in July, on the grounds that the federal judiciary cannot intervene in the internal affairs of party governance and that the final authority rested in the convention. On the opening day of the proceedings in Miami Beach the McGovern team sent a minority report from the Credentials Committee to the convention floor and, with a difficult behind-the-scenes agreement to forfeit their support for an affirmative action challenge against South Carolina, won approval of upholding the California results.[41]

---

[41] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 4 April 2016; Women's Education for Delegate Selection, "South Carolina Challenge," Box 282, Folder 4: Delegate Selection, National Women's Political Caucus Records, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. See also, Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*, 72-81; White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 214-5.

While McGovern's success in the California challenge won him the Democratic nomination, the symbolic effect of his partisans unceremoniously unseating the former powerbroker of the old politics, Richard Daley, did much to hurt his chances of winning the presidency. Daley rejected a compromise position offered by the McGovern team to seat both Illinois delegations and dilute their votes accordingly. As New Politics reformer and McGovern operative Eli Segal later reflected, "humiliating Daley with Jesse Jackson and all that he was identified with was very bad."[42] Moreover, it sent a shockwave through the party that persuaded many outside observers that reform was going too far. Anticipating the contours of the counter-reform movement to come, *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mike Royko put his objections in an open letter to the Chicago credentials challengers:

> I just don't see where your delegation is representative of Chicago's Democrats. … About half of your delegates are women. About a third of your delegates are black. Many of them are young people. You even have a few Latin Americans. But as I looked over the names of your delegates, I saw something peculiar. … There's only one Italian there. … And only three of your 59 [delegates] have Polish names. … *Your reforms have disenfranchised Chicago's white ethnic Democrats*, which is a strange reform. … Anybody who would reform Chicago's Democratic Party by dropping the white ethnic would probably begin a diet by shooting himself in the stomach.[43]

The Platform Committee and the New Politics' Social Democratic Vision

The O'Hara Commission's reforms also affected the operation and outcome of the convention's Platform Committee. Its expansion of the committee to 150 members, the

---

[42] Segal, quoted in Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*, 81.
[43] Royko, quoted in White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 219 (emphasis added). An in-depth account of the Chicago credentials challenge can be found in Crotty, *Party Reform*, 155-202.

early beginning of its deliberations, as well as its twelve-city regional hearings soliciting public testimony were all changes designed to respond to the turmoil of 1968 and a means of reunifying the party. Indeed, as we have seen, the crafting and meaning of the party platform had been a frequent target of criticism in the regional hearings of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, where it was attacked as an ineffective political statement, both in the sense of being a vaguely worded, meaningless document or, when containing firm statements of policy or principle, a document officeholders felt free to distance themselves from once in office. The new Platform Committee thus sought to "open up" the process. As Harvard University professor Richard Neustadt, chair of the Committee said, "the old image of a small group sequestering itself to hurriedly produce a platform following one week's hearings just before the convention no longer reflects the needs of the party."[44]

The final product, *New Directions: 1972-76*, was in many ways a unique document. At ninety-three pages, it was much longer than the 1968 platform. It was also much more directly policy focused, specifying constituent groups by name and citing concrete numbers, than was typical for the party's statement of principles. This not only reflected the general issue orientation of the New Politics movement, but also its specific institutionalization in the party. As noted in the previous chapter, the Democratic Policy Council (DPC), a less prominent initiative of the party leadership in the aftermath of the 1968 crisis, had served as an incubator for New Politics partisans since 1969, bringing together an array of party insurgents with pragmatic "reform consensus" liberals to produce alternative policy statements critical of the Nixon administration. The DPC had been an important instrument for formally shifting the Democratic Party as a whole to the

---

[44] "Democratic Panel Opens 1972 Platform Hearings," *New York Times*, 16 May 1972.

dovish side of the Vietnam debate after the conflict became the responsibility of the GOP. Like its predecessor organization in the late 1950s, the DPC ultimately had very little impact on public policy, having no institutional mechanism formally linking its policy statements with the activity of Democratic legislators. Between 1969 and 1971, its primary function was as a public relations body within the DNC. However, its years of work found a more politically relevant outlet in the formation of the 1972 Democratic platform. Indeed, many of the items found in *New Directions* were lifted in full from the DPC's 184-page policy recommendations booklet, *Alternatives '72.*

While the DPC's influence in the Platform Committee was significant, the open process facilitated the input of many other party and interest group actors. These included elements of the old coalition such as the AFL-CIO leadership who, while refusing to sit on the Committee, did forward a list of proposals for consideration, as well as more recently mobilized groups such as the United Farm Workers, Common Cause, the Gay Activist Alliance, the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), the New Democratic Coalition, and a range of others who provided testimony throughout the hearings and drafting sessions.

Meeting as a full committee in June 1972, the actual drafting session witnessed a committee rebellion when the chair proposed setting up a fifteen-member subcommittee to produce the final platform for their approval. Instead, with the acquiescence of the chair, the entire 150-member committee hashed out the final version in a surprisingly smooth process, which, according to one party scholar, was "a feat considered an impossibility up to [that] point."[45] Another set of analysts observed that "it was the first

---

[45] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 206.

time in memory that a national party platform had been written through participatory democracy."[46]

For some, however, such an open, participatory process raised concerns about the likely outcome. Considering that McGovern held a plurality of convention delegates elected to the Platform Committee, many expected the platform to be radical in content and inflammatory in tone. As Ben Wattenberg, sitting on the Committee as a representative for Senator Henry Jackson, said, "there won't be any riots in Miami because the people who rioted in Chicago are on the Platform Committee."[47]

But contrary to the dire predictions of Wattenberg, and much to the chagrin of some pro-McGovern members of the New Politics, the final platform was far from radical in the sense of a sharp break from past Democratic platforms. In fact, reflecting a mix of continuity and change, the platform reproduced much of what the New Deal Democratic mainstream had taken for granted in previous years, yet explicitly extended these citizenship rights to newly mobilized groups and into new policy areas. The most radical revision of Democratic Party practice was, of course, the section on foreign policy, where the influence of the McGovern campaign was unmistakable.

> We pledge, as the first order of business, an immediate and complete withdrawal of all US forces in Indochina. All US military action in Southeast Asia will cease. After the end of US direct combat preparation, military aid to the Saigon government, and elsewhere in Indochina, will be terminated.[48]

---

[46] Denis G. Sullivan et al., *The Politics of Representation: The Democratic Convention 1972* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 99.

[47] Quoted in White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 213.

[48] *New Directions: 1972-76*, Democratic Party Platform of 1972, 10 July 1972, available at www.presidency.ecsb.edu. All references to the party platform below are drawn from this source. A more moderate version of the Vietnam plank, calling for negotiations and mutual withdrawal of American and Communist forces, was rejected by the convention as a whole.

However, the document was far from proposing a new "isolationism," as was frequently charged. While it did echo the McGovern campaign's call for a massive reduction in defense spending, it doubled down on a humanitarian foreign policy, including expanding economic aid to Africa, promoting United Nations peacekeeping in the third world, imposing sanctions against Rhodesia and South Africa, promoting economic development in Asia, and extending humanitarian aid to Vietnam. Foreign policy making itself, the "real decisions on issues of war and peace," should include greater congressional participation and public transparency, including reform of classification standards.

In domestic policy, the platform rehashed standard Democratic proposals for tax reform, increasing social security transfers, expanding benefits for Medicare and access to quality housing, and repealing section 14b of the Taft-Hartley Act prohibiting the union closed shop. Indeed, as one set of observers put it, "the platform satisfied all of labor's traditional bread-and-butter demands."[49] Reflecting the new social forces inside the party, the platform also endorsed lowering the age of adulthood to eighteen, extending full citizenship to Native Americans, especially regarding land rights, and making the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution a "priority effort." However, McGovern aides also led successful efforts to quell minority planks that they felt would compromise their candidate's appeal in the general election, such as the feminist plank holding that abortion was a "matter between [a woman] and her doctor," as well as the youth plank calling for the legalization of marijuana.[50]

---

[49] Sullivan et al., *The Politics of Representation*, 96.
[50] Sullivan et al., *The Politics of Representation*, 100.

Most interesting, however, was the first plank that appeared in the 1972 Democratic platform, which defined "full employment – a guaranteed job for all" as "the primary economic objective of the Democratic Party." While full employment had been a staple of the national Democratic Party platform since 1944, the more ambitious phrase, emphasizing *guaranteed* full employment, had subsequently been dropped from the party's statement of principles as early as 1948. Echoing President Franklin Roosevelt's 1944 State of the Union Address, the 1972 platform dedicated the party to make "economic security a matter of right," which meant "a job with decent pay and good working conditions for everyone willing and able to work." The means to achieve such a "right to work" included not only job retraining for those dislocated through automation and deindustrialization but the creation of "millions of jobs" through the expansion of public sector employment, "mak[ing] the government the employer of last resort." The platform pointed to America's desperate need for public works and infrastructure spending, defense reconversion, and environmental cleanup, as well as for the need for affirmative action in all dimensions of public and private life to correct systematic social hierarchies produced by discrimination.

The foregrounding of guaranteed full employment in the 1972 platform was taken almost word for word from the Democratic Policy Council's "Economic Charter for Modern Democrats," which had been authored by New Politics veterans Joseph Duffey, Curtis Gans, as well as the ADA's John Kenneth Galbraith and the NWPC's Gloria Steinem.[51] The call for guaranteed full employment itself was the centerpiece in a larger vision of a renewed social democratic agenda for the United States, one that went beyond

---

[51] "Resolution: The Economic Charter for Modern Democrats," Box 95, Folder: Economics, General, 1971, George McGovern Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

many cold war liberals' accommodation with the domestic limits of New Deal policy. "This is an era of great change," the platform announced in its section on *Rights, Power, and Social Justice*.

> The world is fast moving into a future for which the past has not prepared us well; a future where to survive, to find answers to the problems which threaten us as a people, we must create qualitatively new solutions. We can no longer rely on old systems of thought, the results of which were partially successful programs that were heralded as important social reforms in the past. It is now time to rethink and reorder the institutions of this country so that everyone – women, blacks, Spanish-speaking, Puerto Ricans, Indians, the young and the old – can participate in the decision-making process inherent in the democratic heritage to which we aspire. We must restructure the social, political, and economic relationships throughout the entire society in order to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth and power.

As the *New York Times* recognized, such a vision was less a radical break from the past than it was "a return to the initial thrust of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal," one that also expressed "recent disillusionment with the fruits of postwar economic growth." However, the *Times* joined the *Wall Street Journal* in criticizing the platform's "sudden and drastic lurch toward income redistribution," which made the platform as a whole "unfriendly to big business."[52]

In the end, as the Committee chair wrote in the document's preface, the 1972 Democratic Party platform "reflect[ed] the reformed procedures under which it was produced." DNC chair O'Brien agreed, hailing the document as the result of "the most open" drafting process in the party's history.[53] But those who hailed the platform as

---

[52] "Shaping the Democratic Platform," *New York Times*, 2 July 1972; "Unfriendly to Big Business," *Wall Street Journal*, 28 June 1972.
[53] *For the People: Report of the Democratic Platform Committee*, Box 157, Folder: Democratic National Committee: Platform Committee, Convention Deliberations, 1972, McGovern Papers.

merely an output of the new system risked placing too much emphasis on formal processes than on political power. The platform was more than an experiment in "participatory democracy." It was a vision statement of the social forces empowered by the reforms. After all, procedural openness also prevented party leaders from shutting out the supporters of George Wallace, who, despite his own absence from the convention due to an assassination attempt, had significant partisan representation on the Platform Committee. However, the fact that party reform had always been linked to the New Politics' political vision was reflected in the defeat of every single "law and order" platform proposal offered up by the Wallacites.[54] Rather than producing a new potpourri of party principles and policy planks, the New Politics movement crafted a coherent program that sought to extend the promises of the New Deal Democratic Party beyond the limitations of its former coalition. McGovern hailed it as carving out a "new center" in American politics.[55]

The Rules Committee and the Question of the Party Charter

The Rules Committee also served as an important site of the New Politics' transformation of the party in 1972. However, this was not so much because of what happened inside its proceedings, but what its proceedings indicated about the contours of the second phase of the reform movement. As we have seen, the necessarily belated turn of the McGovern-Fraser and O'Hara reform commissions to the issue of strengthening the national party structure resulted in an ambitious proposal to construct what chairs James O'Hara and

---

[54] See Sullivan et al., *The Politics of Representation*, 101-2.
[55] McGovern, quoted in Sullivan et al., *The Politics of Representation*, 103.

Donald Fraser called an "in-between-conventions-organization."[56] Breaking with 150 years of tradition in which the national party only "assumed reality" once every four years to nominate and help elect a candidate for president, the charter proposed creating a continuous, active national organization in Democratic Party politics, which would feature a restructured DNC, a new regional set of organizations, biennial national conferences to determine party program and policy, a mass dues-paying membership, and a semi-autonomous educational and training arm to organize the party rank and file, cultivate new voters, and recruit party candidates. In response to many of the New Politics advocates who criticized the power of officeholders to dominate party affairs, the commissioners intended to "build the party as an institution [that was] bigger than any of its officeholders, bigger than any of its candidates."[57] Indeed, even the party chair would be liberated from its traditional subordination to the White House, instead being elected to a four-year term, overlapping with presidential nominations, by the national policy conference.

The proposal, the Democratic Party Charter, was disseminated throughout the party for feedback in March 1972. Unsurprisingly, its promise to "discard the frustrating weaknesses of the present system and usher in a new and vastly strengthened structure, based on broad grassroots support," quickly ran into severe opposition from party stakeholders.[58]

---

[56] National Democratic Party Structure, Draft Cover Letter, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party; O'Hara Rules Commission; Charter Proposal 2, O'Hara Collection.

[57] James O'Hara, quoted in Alan L. Otten, "Charter," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 June 1972.

[58] Letter from James O'Hara and Donald Fraser to undisclosed recipients, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Formation of Commission, Finances, O'Hara Collection. The draft charter proposal was also read into the *Congressional Record* by Fraser, 27 March 1972.

Unlike the relative absence of coordinated protest during the implementation of delegate selection reform, the charter proposal hit a wall of organized opposition almost immediately. This was partly a matter of timing. State party officials who had willfully ignored or simply neglected the proceedings of the McGovern-Fraser Commission over its three years of operation had little opportunity to resist effectively by the time they found themselves bound to comply with its set of directives. By early 1972, however, when the effects of those changes were palpable, resistance to a new front in the reform struggle was readily at hand. Opposition to the charter was also a matter of substance. For all the novel features of the McGovern-Fraser reform guidelines, their changes for procedural standards of fairness and due process were very difficult to oppose in principle. The utter mess of unwritten rules, local customs, and folk traditions that had governed internal party affairs for well over a century found very few defenders as such. [59] As we have seen, nearly all stakeholders agreed that some kind of party modernization project was called for in the wake of the 1968 crisis. The same was *not* true of the party structure, whose decentralized federal organization had been a point of praise in many academic texts and a source of power for many state party actors. To propose what O'Hara and Fraser themselves described as a "sharp break with the past" was sure to galvanize greater opposition than delegate selection reform. [60]

The reaction of Al Barkan and the labor operatives in COPE did not involve the details of the charter proposal as such, but instead dismissed the entire project as a distraction. In reaction to the DNC's solicitation of their comments in March 1972,

---

[59] This important observation is made by David Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal, 1968-1972," *Studies in American Political Development* 10 (1996).

[60] Memo from James O'Hara and Donald Fraser to All Members of the Rules Committee, "Proposed New Charter for the Democratic Party of the United States," n.d., Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 3, O'Hara Collection.

COPE representatives asked, "why are you guys trying to load this on us at a time when we can hardly salvage your party and get a candidate that can beat Nixon?" Barkan's staff tabled the possibility of holding a kind of "constitutional convention" for the party following the 1972 elections, but as a DNC staff member observed, "we have a long way to go" in bringing labor on board.[61]

In late June, as the convention's Rules Committee was considering what to do with the party structure proposal, Democratic members of the House of Representatives, many of whom were frustrated with having their automatic delegate privileges rescinded, engaged in a vocal display of protest over the charter, voting 105-50 to denounce the proposal as "not in the best interests of the Democratic party." Led by an Illinois representative closely associated with Chicago mayor Richard Daley, and in defiance of the Democratic leadership in the House, who feared the effects of such an outburst on the eve of the national convention, caucus members angrily announced their opposition to what they saw as another vehicle for "activists and militants to take over the party."[62] By stripping away automatic delegate status, Ohio representative Wayne Hays said, "the McGovern-O'Hara-Fraser commissions reformed us out of the presidency, and now they're trying to reform us out of a party."[63] In addition to attacking what they called the "quotas" for women, racial minorities, and young people, House Democrats focused their criticisms on the proposed midterm policy conferences, alleging such gatherings would be unrepresentative and unreflective of the party mainstream. Hays objected that "you can't have a 3,000-member committee setting policy for the party. That's the job of

---

[61] Memo from Bill Welsh to Lawrence O'Brien, "Briefing of Labor on the Party Organization Plan," 28 March 1972, Box 240, Folder: Labor 1972, O'Brien Papers.
[62] Marjorie Hunter, "House Democrats Score Party Reform Proposals," *New York Times*, 29 June 1972.
[63] Quoted in White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 213.

Congress and elected officials." He advised "every House member to run for Congress on his own and try to survive."[64]

The greatest source of opposition to the substance of the proposed party charter, however, came from the newly formed Association of State Democratic Chairs (ASDC), an organization whose formation was, in the words of former South Carolina state chair Donald Fowler, a "causal and direct" reaction to the reform movement.[65] In response to the unprecedented assertion of national party authority exercised through the reform process, state party leaders, sensing acutely the loss of their former autonomy, joined together against a national committee they criticized as disconnected and insufficiently concerned with the day-to-day mechanics of running the state organizations – traditionally considered the constituent units of the party. As for the charter, by planning to introduce a regional layer to better interface state and national party levels, state chairs had the most at stake in the fate of the proposal. Adding a middle tier of committee organization and participatory policy conferences would only restrict further the capacity of state parties to govern their own affairs and, they feared, win elections.

Accordingly, the ASDC took note of the plan for structural reform even before the charter proposal was drafted and circulated.[66] After studying the circulated proposal in March 1972, chair of the ASDC and leader of Minnesota's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, Richard Moe, sent a cautionary note to the charter authors warning them that their proposal "will be interpreted as an effort to dictate state party structure." Indeed, the commission staff acknowledged as much among themselves: "As I understand it," one

---

[64] Mary Russell, "Democrats Vote to Delay Some Reforms," *Washington Post*, 29 June 1972.
[65] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016.
[66] See Memo from Spencer Oliver to Executive Committee of State Democratic Chairman's Association, "Restructuring of the Democratic Party," 4 January 1972, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Minutes of Party Structure 1971, Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN.

wrote, "we decided to dictate state party structure."[67] During testimony offered to the Rules Committee in June, ASDC executive director Spencer Oliver communicated that the Association "objected … most strenuously" to the "regional concept" introduced by the charter. "Any kind of workable system" linking the national party to the grassroots level, he argued, "should come from some political jurisdiction – that is, the state, the city, or county," rather than a regional structure that has no clear jurisdictional referent in the American political system.[68] For his part, South Carolina's Donald Fowler attacked the charter's dues-based membership scheme as "the most reprehensible and dangerous" innovation yet suggested by the reformers. It "plays into the hands of … those who are highly motivated because of special interests or extreme ideological commitments," and would have the consequence of disenfranchising average Democratic voters.[69]

There were notable exceptions to this chorus of opposition, however. President of the Communications Workers Joseph Beirne forwarded a note of appreciation to the commissioners, identifying the expansion of the "right" to "help make party policy" as "the most important and far-reaching" change for the Democratic Party.[70] Support for a strong, disciplined party came from other, more surprising quarters as well. The party's own Finance Committee, normally concerned with issues related to fundraising, noted the financial liability that had attended some Democrats' obdurate stance on the Vietnam War in 1968. While acknowledging that "the country has now united overwhelmingly in opposition to the war," the Committee went on to underscore the "inseparable

---

[67] Memo from David Seidman to James O'Hara and Donald Fraser, 16 March 1972, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 2, O'Hara Collection.
[68] Testimony of Spencer Oliver, Box 46, Folder: Democratic Party, 1972 Convention, Rules Committee, Hearing Transcript, June 22, 1972, O'Hara Collection.
[69] "Comments on New Charter," Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: 1, Fraser Papers.
[70] Joseph A. Beirne to Donald Fraser, 5 May 1972, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: R/C – Charter 1972, Fraser Papers.

connection" between fundraising and "the principles and programs" of the party. The Committee concluded the charter "will contribute significantly to the development of one national Democratic Party, as distinguished from *the balkanized Party* which now exists and which often finds Democratic officials opposing programs overwhelmingly adopted by our Party."[71]

Still, there were significant defections within the New Politics coalition regarding the charter. Despite their generally supportive role in pushing for party reform since 1968, the ADA's Charter Study Committee balked at O'Hara and Fraser's proposal for a regional substructure for the Democratic Party. The regional organization, the committee chair reported to the DNC, "serves no functional purpose," and "the effort and energy expended in organizing regional conferences would be better spent in statewide conventions and conferences which will actually affect the activities and programs of the state parties."[72] While the ADA offered the sharpest rebuke to the charter within the New Politics fold, many other reform groups and organizations, consumed with the presidential race and convention planning, simply failed to rally behind the original proposal.

Interestingly, however, the members of the ASDC who so opposed some of the charter's proposals did not seek to turn back the clock on the reforms by scrapping the charter altogether. On the contrary, having become painfully aware of the new capacities of the national party, state chairs became "reformers" of a kind themselves and seized on the charter proposal as a vehicle for restraining the autonomy of the national committee

---

[71] See the series of memos in Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Formation of Commission, Finance, O'Hara Collection (emphasis added).

[72] Cleta Deatherage, ADA Committee to Study the New Charter, "Comments on New Charter," Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: 1, Fraser Papers.

to run roughshod over its state affiliates, as it had with the McGovern-Fraser reforms.[73]

For the price of their support, the ASDC demanded that all state party chairs be formally integrated into the restructured DNC, a significant modification of the existing proposal. While not a majority, party chairs would now be able to exert power as a voting bloc within the national party, foreclosing the likelihood that the national party would ever again be able to impose binding regulations on state parties without their consent.

In response to this compromise proposal, as well as the volume of opposition against the charter and the relative absence of pressure for its passage, Fraser and O'Hara heavily revised their proposal to restructure the Democratic Party, resubmitting to the convention Rules Committee a version without regional organizations or a dues-paying membership, and agreeing to the inclusion of all state chairs (plus the highest ranking state party member of the opposite sex) into an expanded, more representative DNC.[74] However, while the Rules Committee agreed to approve the immediate reform of the DNC, so far reaching were the remaining alternations to party structure and governance, especially mandatory midterm policy conferences and the election of the party chair, that it recommended the full convention approve a new party reform commission to study the O'Hara-Fraser draft as well as a midterm party conference to consider the approval of the party's first constitution in 1974. O'Hara, Fraser, and the ASDC agreed to the terms, and the compromise Rules Committee report was approved overwhelmingly by the convention, with the few speaking against it in favor of its original, stronger version.

---

[73] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016.
[74] Rules Committee, "Explanation of Amendments to the Proposed Charter of the Democratic Party," Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 3, O'Hara Collection; Transcript of Interview with Donald Fraser, 9 August 1972, Box 149.G.11.10F, Folder: Draft of Interview with Fraser with Jim and Iric Nathanson, Fraser Papers.

Stop McGovern Versus Labor for McGovern

With the California credentials dispute settled on the first day of the convention, the Stop McGovern movement appeared to lose momentum as the coalition fractured under the inevitability of the New Politics nominee. McGovern's main challengers, Muskie and Humphrey, formally withdrew from the race after their failure in the California contest. Only Washington senator Henry Jackson, a committed cold war liberal, made a last stand in the face of McGovern's imminent victory. While seconding Georgia governor Jimmy Carter's nomination of Jackson for president, Steelworkers president I.W. Abel, who had refused his role on the McGovern-Fraser Commission, set the tone of the post-convention conflict to come. Echoing the rhetoric that Jackson and his advisor Ben Wattenberg had been crafting throughout the campaign, depicting the struggle over the shape and nature of the Democratic Party as a conflict between liberal, white collar elites and the blue collar "common man," Abel denounced the "self-styled liberals, the anti-labor snobs," and all those "who call themselves advocates of new politics." What the party needed was "a candidate who speaks for the vital progressive center – where the people are."[75]

Abel's attack on the New Politics, however, was not the final shot in the battle for a lost cause. On the contrary, it proved to be the opening salvo in a months long battle of anti-reform, labor-liberal cold warriors against the presidential candidacy of George McGovern. The Democratic nominee's advisors, who naively expected labor bosses such as George Meany to eventually be forced into the McGovern fold by rank-and-file pressure from below, were sorely disappointed.[76]

---

[75] *Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention 1972*, 380-1.
[76] Allan Wolper, "Forecast: Meany to Aid McGovern," *New York Post*, 12 July 1972.

Curiously, the centerpiece of the post-convention Stop McGovern movement was a discourse of class struggle – a framework which, as we have seen, became the basis for many of the critics' subsequent scholarship.[77] Over the succeeding months between the July convention and the November election, labor leaders and liberal commentators within the Stop McGovern camp engaged in a vigorous publicity campaign against the New Politics movement responsible for McGovern's nomination. Writing in the *Washington Post*, John Roche, former Johnson aide and former national chair of the ADA, depicted the controversy over McGovern's candidacy as representing "a class struggle within the Democratic Party," pitting the labor movement against "the intelligentsia, the 'limousine liberals,' the upper-class ladies in sandals who live in the city but send their children to private schools and spend their spare time condemning the 'racism' of the ethnics who resent busing."[78] COPE's Al Barkan echoed the same inflammatory rhetoric of class struggle when he vowed that "we aren't going to let these Harvards-Berkeleys-Camelots take over our party."[79] George Meany, in an address before the Steelworkers biennial gathering in September, construed the Miami Beach convention as elitist, emphasizing that large numbers of attendees held college degrees and had incomes of over $25,000. "It was a classy convention of the elite," he said. And while he acknowledged that there had been hundreds of new labor delegates in

---

[77] See, for example, Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*; Jean Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1978); Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 86-94.

[78] John P. Roche, "McGovern Faces Class Warfare," *Washington Post*, 12 August 1972.

[79] Quoted in White, *The Making of the President 1972*, 48.

attendance, there had also been "gay liberation activists and people who want to liberalize abortion. … We [working people] will not be shunted aside by an elite."[80]

As Meany's words indicated, while the class struggle between McGovern liberals and the working class was the dominant theme uniting the Stop McGovern movement, an additional irony was its appropriation and co-optation of the New Politics' rhetoric of exclusion. In language reminiscent of 1968 and the McGovern-Fraser Commission hearings thereafter, Meany's unwillingness to be "shunted aside" by a new "elite" indicted the undemocratic or at least unrepresentative nature of the New Politics movement and their newfound power in the Democratic Party. Another former LBJ aide and future member of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Peter Rosenblatt, underscored this parallel explicitly, writing in the *New York Times* that "like the dissenters in Chicago, I feel that I have been shut out and that my views were substantially under-represented" in Miami Beach. "The loudly trumpeted reform of party institutions achieved by the 1968 protesters," he said, "produced a convention this year which was no less unrepresentative," although "the identity of the victims and the means used to achieve the result did change." Rosenblatt warned that the new undemocratic party built by the reformers would produce defeat in November: "Those who feel as I do this year do not express themselves in demonstrations. On the contrary, in the customary fashion of moderates everywhere, they register their disapproval by silently withdrawing their support."[81]

If some "moderates" were withdrawing their support silently, as Rosenblatt predicted, others did so quite loudly, as when George Meany hastily called a special

---

[80] Quoted in Philip Shabecoff, "Meany Criticizes 'Elite' Democrats," *New York Times*, 19 September 1972.
[81] Peter R. Rosenblatt, "Democrat 'on the Outside,'" *New York Times*, 20 July 1972.

meeting of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, reportedly "only hours after the Democratic convention ended," to extract a unanimous vote announcing an officially "neutral" policy stance for the labor federation in the 1972 presidential election.[82] (The actual vote was 27 to 3 with 5 abstentions.) "We don't think this man is good for labor," Meany said in a press conference.[83] Al Barkan put it more bluntly: "You so-called responsible leaders of this party seem to think the kids and the kooks and the Bella Abzugs can win you some elections. Well, we're going to let them try to do it for you this year."[84] In fact, Meany's efforts to undermine the Democratic nominee had begun even before the convention let out, when the AFL-CIO president circulated an anonymous fifty-five page white paper among the delegates attacking McGovern's record on labor legislation.[85] While it was accurate that McGovern had in 1966 voted against the repeal of Taft-Hartley's section 14b when it was clear that it would not pass the Senate anyway, factually the charge of being an anti-labor politician was difficult to make stick. By COPE's own rating system McGovern scored a 95 percent "right" voting record – an important factor in securing union funding for his reelection in 1968. Compared with Nixon's 13 percent COPE score, or even Lyndon Johnson's 60 percent rating, the New Politics nominee's pro-labor record was only exceeded by Hubert Humphrey.[86]

---

[82] Byron E. Calame, "Meany on the Spot," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 July 1972. Records of the emergency session of the AFL-CIO Executive Council are not included in the official minutes. However, see "Endorsement of Presidential Candidate," 28-29 August 1972, AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting Minutes, Box 40, AFL-CIO Records.

[83] Quoted in Joseph D. Goulden, *Jerry Wurf: Labor's Last Angry Man* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 217.

[84] Alexander Barkan, quoted in Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 111.

[85] While it was widely suspected at the time, Meany later accepted responsibility for the anti-McGovern literature. See his exchange with Joseph Beirne on 19-26 February 1973, AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting Minutes, AFL-CIO Records; and Neil Gilbride, "Labor Hits McGovern Over Vietnam," *New York Post*, 12 July 1972.

[86] See Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 106-7.

Meany rationalized the unprecedented move of the AFL-CIO Executive Council taking a neutral position in a presidential race by restating the founding philosophy of nonpartisanship characteristic of the American Federation of Labor under its founder Samuel Gompers. When asked about labor's apparently strained relationship with the Democratic Party, Meany told the audience of *Face the Nation*:

> I have no interest in parties. Parties don't mean anything. … I have nothing to do with the internal workings of the Democratic Party. This is a myth. … I've been characterized as one of the big wheels in the Democratic Party, and this is completely and absolutely untrue. … My party is the trade union movement.[87]

That such a post hoc rationalization was anything more than posturing was not lost on other top labor leaders in the trade union hierarchy. As the UAW's Paul Schrade said incredulously, the claim of nonpartisanship "is strange coming from the President of the AFL-CIO who sits in his hotel room at Democratic conventions trying to dictate on candidates, platform, and credentials." [88] Even Meany's long-time lieutenant Lane Kirkland later observed that "anybody who knew George Meany knew he was up to his ears in partisan politics."[89] Indeed, only a week after securing the neutrality vote, Meany spent a day golfing with President Nixon and his top aides.[90]

But if Meany's attempts to smear McGovern's legislative record or fall back on an ostensibly nonpartisan policy failed to offer compelling reasons for his opposition,

[87] Transcript, George Meany on *Face the Nation*, 3 September 1972, Box 47, Folder: George McGovern: Labor Movement, 1972, Civil Rights Department, AFL-CIO Records.
[88] Quoted in Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 86.
[89] Remarks of AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland at Meeting of State Federation Officers, 29 September 1982, "Labor in Partisan Politics," COPE Files (unprocessed), AFL-CIO Records.
[90] John Herling, "Mr. Meany Runs Into Some Sharp Questioning," *Washington Post*, 14 August 1972; Widick, "Meany's Last Hurrah," 138.

others saw through the rhetoric. While Meany was no doubt personally affronted by members of the counterculture ("those who look like Jacks, act like Jills, and have the odor of johns about them") and despised McGovern for being "soft" on foreign policy ("he has become an apologist for the communist world"), his fundamental objection was to his own loss of powerbroker status in the reformed Democratic Party as well as the general threat democratization posed for the labor union hierarchy.[91] AFSCME's Jerry Wurf saw the first point clearly when he observed in *The New Republic*, "the Executive Council vote has more to do with how McGovern won the nomination than with his record before or during the campaign."[92] He recognized that "the real concern was participation and access." However, Wurf's belief that "the AFL-CIO's vested interest … ignored the rich opportunities for workers and their unions" to be part of a "more open, 'new' party" overestimated the flexibility of labor's institutional position. His observation that "reform presented an opportunity [for labor] to say goodbye to the bosses and to mobilize the membership" applied much more to his own upstart public employees union – by then adding 1,000 members a week – than it did George Meany's position, which relied on those bosses for party influence.[93]

As Wurf's language suggests, if Meany's AFL-CIO lacked the interest and the capacity to adapt to the reformed party, that did not hold true throughout the trade union movement. The loss of veto power over the Democratic nomination portended a new relationship between labor and the party, one whose channel of influence ran through

---

[91] Quoted in Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, 88; Meany, *Face the Nation*, AFL-CIO Records. For two prominent accounts that point to culture and ideology in explaining Meany's opposition to McGovern, see J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977); and Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*.

[92] Jerry Wurf, "What Labor Has Against McGovern," *The New Republic*, 5-12 August 1972.

[93] Wurf, "What Labor Has Against McGovern," 23. On the growth rate of AFSCME in this period, see Goulden, *Jerry Wurf*, 207.

primaries and caucuses and issue-oriented politics rather than the networks of elite brokerage. Some even speculated that the rift between McGovern and Meany could "cause [an] internal realignment in the labor movement" through an alliance with the New Politics.[94] Indeed, this was what journalist James Wechsler identified as the "more profound" threat embedded in the reform project: not that it deinstitutionalized labor leaders from the smoke-filled rooms of the party but that it demonstrated the potential power of democratizing unrepresentative institutions.

> If the Democratic Party can successfully execute this process of democratization, the idea could become infectious. It might even invite emulation by those trade unions whose conventions resemble Soviet party congresses. Imagine what would happen to the life-style of some ancient labor bodies if they were required to consider adequate representation for the young, and the black, and to admit women to their higher councils.[95]

In the aftermath of Meany's neutrality vote, few had to try very hard to "imagine" such a scenario at all, as the decision to effectively boycott the presidential election, and the heavy-handed way in which that decision was reached, triggered an explosion within the labor movement. In August 1972, following a meeting of African American representatives of the UAW, the Meat Cutters, the American Federation of Teachers, Hotel Workers, AFSCME, the Communication Workers (CWA), and others, the group – which would soon formally become the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) – wrote an open letter to George Meany, disavowing the neutrality position, which "in no way" reflected their views and "ran counter to the interests of Blacks, other minorities, and workers in general." The neutrality decision, they argued, reflected the undemocratic

---

[94] Courtney R. Sheldon, "Big Labor Loses Veto Power in New Democratic Coalition," *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 July 1972; Hobart Rowen, "Meany's Last Hurrah," *Washington Post*, 27 July 1972.
[95] James A. Wechsler, "Meany and McGovern," *New York Post*, 13 July 1972.

nature of the AFL-CIO, within which "Black labor officials must move to exert more influence."[96] Indeed, in 1974, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) would form around very similar demands, aligning closely with the New Politics.[97]

The black trade unionists' statement was only the most dramatic instance of the rebellion set in train by Meany's unilateral move of the AFL-CIO into the vanguard of the Stop McGovern movement. Indeed, as the *Washington Post* observed, "Mr. Meany has created the conditions that invite defiance from within labor's ranks of his authority and judgment."[98] While the AFL-CIO president had managed to swing twenty-seven votes in the emergency session of the Executive Council after the convention in Miami Beach, many of the union officials that had backed him then subsequently joined the revolt by endorsing the Democratic nominee. AFSCME, the International Union of Electricians, and the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers had all originally voted against the neutrality decision, but the CWA, the Machinists (IAM), the Retail Clerks, and the Graphic Arts International Union soon joined them with McGovern endorsements. By the end of August, over forty international unions, including the unaffiliated UAW, had openly defied the stated preference of the president of the union federation. Even those union leaders, such as the Steelworkers' Abel, who backed Meany by approving neutrality policies within their own executive councils, soon faced defiant union locals endorsing McGovern.[99]

---

[96] Memo, 18 August 1972, Box 47, Folder: George McGovern: Labor Movement, 1972, AFL-CIO Records.
[97] Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, 91; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 201-5.
[98] "While Mr. Meany Sits It Out," *Washington Post*, 26 July 1972.
[99] Schlesinger, *The New Reformers*, 91.

Moreover, some of the unions backing McGovern took the further step of cutting off their financial contributions to COPE. The CWA, IAM, AFSCME and others were among the largest in the federation, and their withdrawal of support deprived the AFL-CIO's political arm of significant funds. [100] As CWA president Joseph Beirne's explanation for his withdrawal from COPE shows, the McGovern-Meany split had galvanized a far-reaching attack on the very nature of the trade union federation.

> I withdrew from COPE because it was out of touch with what was happening in the political process – with the reforms which I think were a natural evolution in the Democratic Party, and with McGovern who was the candidate who had done the most for the working man. COPE must be changed. We who contribute to it have no control over it or participation in its policy decisions. The COPE leaders live in the dreams of the past, where they wheeled and dealed in politics. The Executive Council of the AFL-CIO should be reformed, too. All we do there is endorse candidates and nothing else. Our union now feels we can make our own political decisions and spend our money more fruitfully by going it alone. [101]

While Beirne and other labor leaders defied Meany and withdrew from COPE, they did not in fact "go it alone." On the contrary, the forty unions and dozens of locals that had broken with Meany's neutrality position formed the Labor for McGovern Committee alongside the UAW under the leadership of Joseph Keenan (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers), Howard Samuel (Amalgamated Clothing Workers), and Beirne. [102]

In response to the upsurge of open defiance, Meany cracked down in the few ways he could. Because the AFL-CIO was a trade union federation of 117 international unions, the neutrality decision did not prevent any of those affiliated unions from making

---

[100] Ben A. Franklin, "McGovern Bloc Controls Half of Union Treasuries," *New York Times*, 31 July 1972.
[101] Quoted in Schlesinger, *The New Reformers*, 95.
[102] See the list of pro-McGovern labor unions with memberships greater than 300,000 in Box 240, Folder: Labor 1972, O'Brien Papers.

their own endorsements, however untypical was the behavior. In response to those AFL-CIO members who did break from Meany's neutrality, the federation president could only threaten them with shifting from his position of neutrality in the 1972 election to open endorsement of Nixon. When overwhelmed by a wave of criticism from the audience during an address to COPE operatives in August, Meany warned, "I am trying to stay neutral. But I am being pushed. If you push me too hard, I may take action you'll regret."[103]

While Meany could not sanction the defiant union leaders inside the AFL-CIO, who were formally his equals, he displayed punitive action against labor councils that came out for McGovern because they were accountable to the union federation directly. After their endorsement of the Democratic candidate, Meany suspended the Colorado Labor Council's charter as well as its top officers, and placed its funds under national control, all on the grounds that its endorsement was "detrimental to the best interests" of the AFL-CIO. Meany followed up with letters threatening similar actions to the state labor councils of California, Oklahoma, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, Iowa, and Texas. When these state labor bodies responded by rephrasing their endorsements of McGovern more obliquely – protesting the policies of the Nixon administration and warning their members against his reelection – Meany wrote an angry rebuke to a California state official, saying that "a call for the defeat of one candidate is equivalent to an endorsement of the other." While a federal judge temporarily halted Meany's attack on the Colorado Labor Council (CLC), its appeal to the AFL-CIO Executive Council to resolve the dispute and reinstate its officers was defeated. The CLC's leaders, Meany charged, had "pursued a policy of deliberate defiance," adding that "it is important that

___

[103] Herling, "Meany Runs Into Sharp Questioning."

we maintain authority over these bodies. …[It is not] a question of politics – it is a question of policy."[104]

Conclusion

The splits within labor exposed and exasperated by McGovern's nomination belie the surface level plausibility of the Stop McGovern coalition's claims regarding the elitism and class dynamics of the New Politics movement and its reform of the Democratic Party. As we have seen, the delegate selection reforms engineered by the New Politics movement brought into the convention more women, racial minorities, young people, and union members than ever before, while also increasing the representation of those earning below the median income level. That convention produced a party platform that returned to, and extended, the reach of New Deal liberalism by prioritizing affirmative action, equal citizenship, and guaranteed full employment. It was, however, a decidedly New Politics rendition of American social democracy, shorn of vital center liberalism's cold war foreign policy agenda and its compromising coalition with southern conservatives.

McGovern went down to a historic landslide defeat in November by a margin of 60.7 to 37.5 percent of the popular vote, losing every state to Nixon except Massachusetts and the District of Columbia in a lopsided Electoral College vote of 520 to 17. The grassroots army that had effectively organized state after state during the primaries was no match for a campaign that suffered a litany of problems, including bungling the replacement of vice-presidential nominee Senator Thomas Eagleton for mental health

---

[104] "Meany Punishes Mavericks," *Daily News*, 21 September 1972; "AFL-CIO Take-Over of Colorado Labor Council Prohibited by Court," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 October 1972; Peter Milius, "Meany Slaps More State Labor Units," *Washington Post*, 5 October 1972; "1972 Politics," AFL-CIO Records; Appeal – Colorado Labor Council, 19-26 February 1973, Box 40, AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting Minutes, AFL-CIO Records.

reasons soon after the convention, failing to communicate the campaign's economic platform for universal basic income that could counter the charge of 'mass welfarism,' and having so deep an association with the new social movements that many observers questioned who was leading whom.[105] McGovern also faced open defection within party ranks, as former Texas governor John Connally (who would in 1973 officially switch to the GOP) led a "Democrats for Nixon" bolt from the nominee. As Connally and his supporters put in a full-page ad that ran in the *New York Times* in August, "We have nothing against Senator McGovern personally. But we feel strongly that many of his views could prove disastrous to the future of our country."[106] Lastly, despite both the rhetoric of and real increases in participation, voter turnout hit a new postwar low, dropping sharply from 60 to 55 percent between 1968 and 1972, notwithstanding the enactment of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowering the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen years old.

Meanwhile, the Republican administration waged a reelection campaign focused on exploiting suburban middle class anxieties and working class divisions and resentments. This was less the famed southern strategy of Wallace-esque racial populism than it was a "suburban strategy" aimed at articulating a new "silent majority" stretching across the entire country. As effective (and affective) as this strategy was, the Nixon campaign also engaged in criminal actions, agent provocateurism, and gross media manipulation. Added to this was the typical incumbent advantage of dominating the news

---

[105] For these problems and many more, see the campaign strategy memos collected in Box 241, Folder: McGovern/Shriver Campaign, 1972, O'Brien Papers. See also, Bruce Miroff, "Movement Activists and Partisan Insurgents," *Studies in American Political Development* 21 (2007).
[106] See the ad "Democrats for Nixon," available at neoconservatism.vaisse.net.

cycle and setting the political agenda, as with Nixon's famous trip to China and his promises that "peace is at hand" in the Vietnam War negotiations.[107]

Given these factors, it is difficult to weigh the exact importance of the split in the trade union leadership and the class warfare line promoted by the Stop McGovern coalition. But this certainly did hurt McGovern's chances in the November election to some extent. Despite the best efforts of the Labor for McGovern Committee, their hastily put together apparatus was no match for the electoral capacities of COPE, which successfully focused its efforts on protecting the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. The day after the election, George Meany issued a press release praising the American people for "overwhelmingly repudiating neo-isolationism as the basis for foreign policy." He went on: "under these circumstances, we believe that the AFL-CIO truly reflected the feelings of our rank-and-file when we declined to endorse either candidate. That decision has been vindicated by events."[108] Labor-oriented civil rights leader Bayard Rustin went one step further than Meany, foreshadowing the conflicts to come, when in his post-election press release he criticized those trying to pin responsibility on McGovern personally as "superficial and self-serving." As he concluded, "the problem lay not with McGovern, but with his supporters and the changes they made in the Democratic Party."[109]

McGovern's presidential campaign, including the reforms that made such a phenomenon possible, signified the high water mark of the New Politics movement in the

---

[107] See Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 125-66; Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment*.

[108] AFL-CIO Press Release, 8 November 1972, Box 42, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority 1972, AFL-CIO Records.

[109] Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph Institute press release, 10 November 1972, Box 42, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, 1972, AFL-CIO Records.

Democratic Party. While its sharp rejection at the polls did not put an end to the movement, it did turn the tide against further progress. Not only did McGovern's loss have a pronounced demobilizing effect on reform leaders and activists, it also provided anti-reformers with a persuasive counter-argument where no rationale had been available before. This intellectual void had been perfectly displayed in future CDM spokesperson Ben Wattenberg's convoluted defense of the pre-reformed party in 1970:

> What can be said about the delegate selection system is this: Somehow it works. All the delegates are *elected* or, if not, are *selected* by people who *were elected* popularly or, in some cases, selected by people who were selected by people who were elected popularly at one time or another. There is, then, a democratic process, if far removed, behind each delegate.[110]

It is indicative of the efficacy of the New Politics movement, and the broader New Left before them, that arguments in defense of undemocratic systems of political representation such as this galvanized little in the way of organized support or public endorsement in 1970. The New Politics movement powerfully shaped the interpretation of the 1968 party crisis, after which very few could come out against the reformers once the mainstream party leadership had accepted reform as the price for unity. However, McGovern's devastating loss at the polls altered these circumstances. And while the principles of democratic inclusion and fair representation still could not be attacked directly, as we will see, the reformers' institutional means to achieve these ends were targeted in the name of democratic representation, electoral success, and restoring a Democratic majority.

---

[110] Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 143.

CHAPTER 7

AFTER THE LANDSLIDE:
THE COALITION FOR A DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY
AND THE REDIRECTION OF REFORM

Why shouldn't those of us who want to replace the de facto quota system enacted in 1971 with a truly democratic and open process of electing delegates now be entitled to be considered the "reformers"?
-- The Coalition for a Democratic Majority (1974)[1]

Senator George McGovern's landslide defeat in the 1972 presidential election marked a turning point for the New Politics movement inside the Democratic Party. While such a decisive rebuke at the polls did not spell the end of reform as such, the dispiriting effect it had on reform advocates was palpable, as was its encouraging effect on their opponents. However, as the struggle between the New Politics and its antagonists played out in the aftermath of 1972, the anti-New Politics front, with a few important exceptions, did not seek to return the party to the status quo ante. Rather than uprooting the reform project as a whole, which would have risked reenergizing the fatiguing reform coalition and perpetuating intraparty conflict, opponents of the New Politics organized their attack on the terrain of reform itself, using the remaining momentum from 1972 to institutionalize a balance of intraparty power favorable to state party organizations and labor leaders. By exploiting the window of opportunity opened by McGovern's defeat, anti-reformers successfully installed their own version of reform, codifying and constitutionalizing the existing system of party federalism in the new Democratic Party charter.

No agent was more important in redirecting reform than the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM). Composed of moderate and conservative Democrats,

---

[1] *CDM Notes*, October 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973 – November 1974, James O'Hara Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

academic intellectuals, and labor leaders – many of whom had been active in the Stop McGovern movement – the CDM emerged from the ashes of the 1972 defeat with a self-declared mission to root out the New Politics from the Democratic Party. While often supported by other organized intraparty groups, such as the Association of State Democratic Chairs (ASDC), the Democratic Governors Conference, and top officials in the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the CDM was in the vanguard of the counter-reform movement. Over 1972-74, the CDM elaborated the "new class" arguments lodged against McGovernites by focusing its attacks on what it considered to be the undemocratic "quota system" mandated by the McGovern-Fraser guidelines, which it held responsible for producing an "unrepresentative" convention and an unpopular presidential nominee. By concentrating its efforts on the two reform commissions produced by the 1972 convention – the Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure (or Mikulski Commission, as it became known) and the Charter Commission (also known as the Sanford Commission) – the relatively small-sized CDM was able to capitalize on the McGovern defeat and prevent the realization of the reformers' most ambitious agenda: building a truly national Democratic Party.

As we will see, the arguments laid out by the CDM and its coalition of anti-reformers strike a familiar tone for those acquainted with the scholarly literature on party reform. In fact, not only did partisans of the CDM produce some of the most prominent academic studies of the reform process, but their ultimate conclusions became the guiding assumptions for subsequent analysis by non-participants.[2] Thus, even while the

---

[2] For prominent examples of the first generation of scholarship, see Jeane Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); Austin Ranney,

CDM was not victorious in all its policy battles, it did succeed in shifting the general political atmosphere concerning democracy in the Democratic Party and putting the reformers on the defensive in a rearguard struggle to preserve what they had gained between 1968 and 1972. The result was a compromised reform process stalled midway through its transformation, a stalemate whose costs would only become clear in the fight for full employment in the second half of the 1970s.

"Come Home, Democrats": Launching the Coalition for a Democratic Majority

On 7 December 1972, one month after McGovern's defeat in the presidential election, full-page ads appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* inviting "common-sense liberals" to reject the "blare of the New Politics." Under the large headline "Come Home, Democrats" – a play on McGovern's campaign theme of "Come Home, America" – its authors announced that "the 'New Politics' has failed." In the short manifesto that followed, the newly formed Coalition for a Democratic Majority denounced the new, "unrepresentative" social forces that had come to exert "undue influence" within the Democratic Party, "driving [the labor movement] from its traditional place in the vanguard of the Democratic coalition." The CDM enumerated a list of grievances against what it claimed were the core beliefs of the New Politics movement, including: that "the United States must withdraw from its international responsibilities"; that "American society is sick and guilty"; that "one small group [claims] that it knows what it best for others"; and that "porportionalism in accordance

---

Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in American (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); and Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). For the second generation, see Byron E. Shafer, *Quite Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983); and Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

with birth and group origin" trumps "the principle of individual merit." However, in contrast to these values, "the voters have spoken," they said, and "*in repudiating the Democratic/'New Politics' presidential candidacy in this election while re-electing a Democratic Congress, the voters were speaking with precision and sophistication*." The task at hand, the manifesto concluded, was the formation of an "action group" with a "robust voice" that could take advantage of this "historic opportunity" to shift the "climate of opinion."[3]

"Come Home, Democrats" ended with a short list of organizing committee members and an impressive list of sponsors. Among the organizers were former Lyndon Johnson and Henry Jackson advisor Ben Wattenberg, who, along with elections scholar Richard Scammon, had authored the 1970 best-selling anti-New Politics text, *The Real Majority*.[4] Other members of the organizing committee included long-time civil rights and labor activist Bayard Rustin, director of the AFL-CIO sponsored A. Philip Randolph Institute; Penn Kemble, member of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) and former chair of the AFL-CIO's anti-Wallace organization Frontlash; and Committee on Political Education (COPE) operative Robert Keefe. The CDM leadership also featured Democratic officeholders, including Washington State representative and Jackson protégé Thomas Foley, Maryland Board of Education member Richard Schifter, former Hubert Humphrey advisor Max Kampleman, Georgetown professor Jeane Kirkpatrick, and well-known anti-feminist critic Midge Decter. Its long list of sponsors included a

---

[3] "Come Home, Democrats," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, By-Laws, Minutes, etc., O'Hara Collection (emphasis in original). A copy of this manifesto is available at the website for Justin Vaïsse's *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010): www.neoconservatism.vaisse.net.
[4] Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970).

group of prominent academics, such as Nelson Polsby, Reinhard Bendix, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, John Roche, Richard Pipes, and Adam Ulam, some of whom had been vocal critics of the "academic anarchy" of campus protest. The list also included prominent neoconservative intellectuals like Midge Decter's husband Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary Magazine*, and Daniel Bell, editor of *The Public Interest*.[5] The list also hosted a number of labor leaders, including Barkan confidant William DuChessi of the Textile Workers, Walter Burke of the Steelworkers, Louis Stulberg of the International Ladies Garment Workers, and Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers. While the names of Barkan or George Meany were not listed, AFL-CIO secretary treasurer Lane Kirkland had encouraged the formation of the Coalition, provided the group with the seed money for the full-page ads, and continued to serve as the CDM's primary source of funding through the 1970s.[6] As CDM operative Josh Muravchik later put it, "to achieve AFL-CIO dominance over the Democratic Party; that was our goal. And we saw our own role in the little group of [sic] being to help them in an intellectual or agitprop way."[7]

Surprisingly, the CDM's sponsorship list also included several erstwhile party reformers. Austin Ranney, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, had been a very active member of the McGovern-Fraser Commission throughout the body's lifetime, but had evidently turned against its guidelines by December 1972. In his Jefferson Memorial lectures, delivered at Berkeley at the invitation of Nelson Polsby in

---

[5] For a discussion of the academic neoconservatives, see Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 56.

[6] Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 91, 93. The CDM also held well-attended fundraisers in Washington, DC, that included George Meany, Al Barkan, Henry Jackson, as well as Hubert Humphrey. See, for example, *CDM Notes*, December 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority By-Laws, Minutes, Etc., O'Hara Collection.

[7] Josh Muravchik, quoted in Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 93.

early 1973 and later published as *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction*, Ranney criticized the reforms along the same lines as those of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, specifically regarding its implementation of a "quota" system.[8] And while Ranney frequently cited CDM material in his lectures, he failed to disclose his active participation in the anti-reform organization.

In addition to Ranney, and more surprising, was Michigan representative James O'Hara, who had chaired the sibling Commission on Rules from 1969-72 and coauthored the original draft of the party charter with Donald Fraser. However, as a leading member of the CDM, O'Hara quickly became a sharp critic of the reform movement, denouncing the 1972 convention as the "most unrepresentative" in the last century of Democratic Party politics, one which he claimed was dominated by a "militant minority."[9] When Congress reconvened in January 1973 in the wake of McGovern's defeat, O'Hara distributed copies of "Come Home, Democrats" to his all his party colleagues in the House.[10] O'Hara's about-face is curious but not difficult to understand. As fellow reformer William Crotty has pointed out, O'Hara's leadership role in the reform process severely strained his relationship with the AFL-CIO leadership, a major force in his home district in the heavily white ethnic suburbs of Detroit, and nearly cost him reelection in 1972.[11] (He scraped in with a razor-thin 51 to 49 percent victory.) O'Hara himself later indicated his own recoil from the counterculture associated with New Politics at the 1972 convention: "Those who watched over television saw the women's liberation movement,

---

[8] Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction*.
[9] Christopher Lydon, "A Disenchanted Reformer Backs Return to 'the Pols,'" *New York Times*, 4 December 1974. See also, David S. Broder, "New Democratic Coalition Plans Reforming Reforms," *Washington Post*, 7 January 1973.
[10] See the cover letter, 16 January 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.
[11] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 302, note 6.

the gay lib, intellectuals and college kids, pot smokers and others who didn't represent the values most people adhere to."[12] Whatever the true motivation, his conversion from reform advocate to reform critic was a boon to the anti-reformers in the CDM, lending additionally legitimacy and expertise to their project from a source within the New Politics movement itself.

While "Come Home, Democrats" marked the public unveiling of the CDM as a political force inside the Democratic Party, its origins reached back to the pre-election period, when the efforts of the Stop McGovern movement had ended in failure at the 1972 convention in Miami Beach. Throughout the following summer and fall the CDM organizing committee had held regular strategy meetings in Washington, DC. It had also clandestinely gathered its impressive list of sponsors, sensitive to the fact that any premature public knowledge of its project could compromise its post-election impact by appearing to contribute to McGovern's defeat.[13] The manifesto itself was prepared for publication well in advance of the election by Decter, Podhoretz, and the Kirkpatricks (Jeane Kirkpatrick's husband Evron remained a silent member of the CDM's Board of Directors due to his position as chair of the American Political Science Association).[14] The basic thrust of the ad had also received an elaborate treatment in Podhoretz's *Commentary* the week before it ran in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. There, in an article by Penn Kemble and fellow YPSL comrade Josh Muravchik, the authors hailed the "counterrevolution" at the polls that had removed the "sanctity which

---

[12] O'Hara quoted in "Moderate Demos Rework Delegate Selection Rules," *Dallas Times Herald*, 27 April 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.
[13] This is evident in a memo sent from Penn Kemble to AFL-CIO operative Don Slaiman, n.d., Box 42, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, 1972, AFL-CIO Records, George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD; and is confirmed in Ben J. Wattenberg, *Fighting Words: A Tale of How Liberals Created Neo-Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 137.
[14] Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 88.

so long sheltered [the reforms] from serious appraisal" and "made criticism all but impossible." They continued: "But it is now evident that serious criticism is deserved. The reforms have left one of the major institutions of American democracy in a shambles." Kemble and Muravchik went on to provide an entire account of the McGovern-Fraser reform commission from 1968 all the way up to McGovern's victory at the convention – a reform project, they contended, which was meant "to favor the affluent liberals within the party and to diminish the influence of its lower-middle and working-class constituents."[15]

However, it was more than just the bitter taste of political defeat in Miami Beach that motivated the CDM initiators to lay the foundations for what Wattenberg called "a counterweight to the New Politics."[16] From its origins in the 1968 antiwar insurgencies to its reform of the party to the nomination of McGovern, the New Politics movement signified the ideological struggle for the very meaning of American liberalism – a struggle the signatories to the CDM manifesto feared they were losing. As we have seen, the liberalism espoused by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) in the postwar period, defining itself as the "vital center" between anti-New Deal Republicanism on the one hand and Communist-sympathetic Popular Frontism on the other, had been torn apart by the mid-1960s as the contradictions of the New Deal regime became unsustainable. After Richard Scammon announced the need for a "new ADA" in 1972, CDM leaders self-consciously undertook an effort to "redefine liberalism for the 1970s" and, in a replay of the ADA's purge of Communist sympathizers in the late 1940s, attempted "to

---

[15] Penn Kemble and Josh Muravchik, "The New Politics and the Democrats," *Commentary*, 1 December 1972.
[16] Quoted in David S. Broder, "New Democratic Coalition Plans Reforming Reforms," *Washington Post*, 7 January 1973.

cleanse mainstream liberalism" of its left-wing elements.[17] The scale of what was at stake

was expressed in their newsletter *CDM Notes*:

> We now face a need to draw some distinctions between the two major strands of what used to be called liberalism. One strand, with which CDM is aligned, holds that the Democratic Party must rebuild a broad coalition to win back the blue-collar, Southern moderate, Catholic, and "middle-American" voters who deserted the Democratic ticket in 1972. … The second strand seeks to strengthen the forces which came to dominate the party between 1968 and 1972 – an alliance of women, blacks, and youth, led by dissident elements of the affluent, educated middle class.[18]

The CDM was "not looking for unity" between these strands, but intended "to draw

bright, clear lines" between them so that they could make vital center liberalism's internal

splits "into a chasm." "[C]ompromise," Wattenberg said, "would come later."[19]

For members of the CDM, what they reductively labeled "McGovernism" was a

threat pregnant with "the dangers in the broader current of political ideas" that had

emerged from the 1960s New Left, including a "conception of democratic participation"

which they claimed privileged "the demands of the political activist" over the "needs of

the ordinary citizen."[20] One member went so far as to say, "grass roots politics is an

upper middle class sport."[21] Seeing themselves as engaged in a battle to defend traditional

cold war liberalism from the New Politics, members of the CDM defined their project as

restoring "the disaffected and disenfranchised elements of the Democratic Party to

---

[17] Richard Scammon, quoted in Wattenberg, *Fighting Words*, 137; Ben Wattenberg, quoted in Broder, "New Democratic Coalition"; Midge Decter, quoted in "Power Struggle," *The New Republic*, 16 December 1972.
[18] *CDM Notes*, October 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973 – November 1974, O'Hara Collection.
[19] Wattenberg, *Fighting Words*, 145-6.
[20] Kemble and Muravchik, "The New Politics and the Democrats."
[21] Quoted in "Power Struggle," *The New Republic*, 16 December 1972.

influence."[22] Indeed, by employing the "new class" discourse heard from those in the Stop McGovern movement who denounced the New Politics as "elitist," the CDM effectively *turned the politics of insurgency upside down*, casting themselves as the embattled insurgents fighting for influence in an exclusive party.

But the Coalition for a Democratic Majority was not, nor did it ever become, a mass organization, even on the modest scale of the ADA with its national network of local and campus chapters. In fact, despite all its accusations of unrepresentativeness and elitism directed at the New Politics, the CDM was itself a relatively small collection of Washington-based officeholders, lawyers, labor operatives, and intellectuals with no institutional relationship to the mass base for whom it claimed to speak.[23] Indeed, the seductive logic of claiming to represent the voiceless, the uninvolved, and the "silent majority" who were threatened by the newfound power of liberal activists was a powerful discursive weapon in the wake of McGovern's defeat. In his memoir, Ben Wattenberg, chair of the CDM, favorably compared the group to the British Fabian Society, saying that despite being small it had "enormous influence" on society.[24] And like the Fabians, CDMers developed a project they believed would restore political power to, if not to the voiceless working class itself, than those it judged as most able to speak for them: elected officeholders and trade union officials.

---

[22] Kemble and Muravchik, "The New Politics and the Democrats."

[23] Ironically, for all their criticism of quotas, minutes of a CDM Board of Director's meeting reveal that Patricia Roberts Harris, an African American women, "expressed concern that blacks and women should be represented on [CDM] bodies. Evron Kirkpatrick offered to make available a list of black political scientists to be contacted for this purpose." Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority By-Laws, Minutes, Etc., O'Hara Collection.

[24] Wattenberg, *Fighting Words*, 136.

Dislodging "McGovernism": The Battle for the Party Leadership

CDM members were keenly aware that the "cooperation of party professionals," especially DNC chair Lawrence O'Brien, had been a "decisive" factor for the reformers' success between 1968 and 1972.[25] Accordingly, the first front in their battle to retake the party from the New Politics developed around the pivotal figure of the party chair. While no longer occupied by O'Brien, who had resigned after the Miami convention to run McGovern's general election campaign, the position had been filled according to the traditional method of Democratic Party governance: appointment by the presidential nominee. By installing Jean Westwood as chair, McGovern had not only appointed one of his own team, but had appointed the Democratic Party's first woman to the top of the leadership. Westwood had been elected as one of Utah's DNC representatives in 1967 before becoming an early supporter of McGovern's nomination campaign in 1971. McGovern had been conscious of accommodating the demands for greater party representation from New Politics organizations such as the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), especially after having failed to support their credentials challenge against the South Carolina delegation in Miami Beach in exchange for the latter's support in the pivotal California contest.[26] In addition to being an experienced member of the DNC, Westwood had also been a founding member of the NWPC and had functioned as a liaison between the reformers inside and those outside the party during the campaign.[27]

---

[25] Kemble and Muravchik, "The New Politics and the Democrats."
[26] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 4 April 2016. See also, George S. McGovern, *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern* (New York: Random House, 1977), 216-20.
[27] See Jean Westwood's written recollection of her involvement in the party reform movement and the NWPC in Box 1, Folder 8: Founders Notebooks, National Women's Political Caucus Records, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

As McGovern's chair of the DNC and a symbol of the New Politics, Westwood presented an ideal target for the counter-reform movement to signal their commitment to restoring party professionals to power. "Gravel Gertie," as Barkan referred to her, "must go," he demanded.[28] But while there were moderate state party chairs putting their names forward for consideration to run the national committee ahead of its first post-election meeting in December 1972, the CDM made a show of force by consolidating their influence behind Texas Democrat and DNC treasurer Robert Strauss. A protégé of Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, Strauss was the prototypical party official of the "old politics." While he presented himself as non-ideological in orientation, Strauss's pragmatism was deeply entwined with one of the most conservative strains of Democratic politics associated with former Texas governor John Connally, who had spearheaded the "Democrats for Nixon" defection in the fall of 1972. While publicly offering to heal wounds, mend fences, and move on, in private Strauss made it clear he shared a similar view to his Texas compatriot. On his return from the Miami convention he told his wife, "I'm going to get control of the Democratic Party, throw these bastards out, and put this party back together and elect a president." Having spent several years trying to revolutionize the fundraising apparatus of the party, Strauss reported he was "angry" and wanted to become chair "to get even" with the McGovernites who were jeopardizing the fruits of his efforts.[29] Convinced of McGovern's inevitable failure in the general election, Strauss took over the Senate Campaign Committee as a vehicle through which he established contacts with public officeholders and labor leaders who could support his bid for the chairmanship.

---

[28] Quoted in Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 225.
[29] Quoted in Kathryn J. McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 107.

In the weeks between the November elections and the national committee meeting, CDM forces worked out of Henry Jackson's Senate office, lining up the votes to support Westwood's replacement with Strauss. Jackson, while abroad at the time, had personally pushed Meany and Barkan to back the Texan, who had few connections to organized labor. In exchange for their support, Strauss offered the labor leaders eight appointments to the newly expanded DNC should he win, including giving the executive directorship to COPE operative and CDM member Robert Keefe. Crucially, after an intensive lobbying campaign at the Democratic Governors Association meeting in early December, Strauss and AFL-CIO forces extracted eighteen out of thirty-one governors' endorsements to unseat Westwood.[30]

The atmosphere of electoral defeat had robbed Westwood of any significant sources of intraparty support, including from McGovern. As he later reflected, "since we lost so overwhelmingly … I didn't want any Democrat to think we were going to cling to my appointment with Jean Westwood. It wasn't that I was unhappy with her – I just didn't think we ought to get into a battle to keep her on after my defeat."[31] When the DNC met on December 9th, two days after the CDM's "Come Home, Democrats" ad had signaled the organization's national debut, Westwood was deposed and replaced with Strauss by four-and-a-half votes.[32]

But if the coalition of anti-reformers had scored a significant victory in deposing Westwood, some, such as Al Barkan, soon discovered that Strauss, while eager to provide labor with "a big seat at the table," was not going to be an instrument to engineer

---

[30] David S. Broder, "Labor Exerting New Muscle in Democratic Party," *Washington Post*, 2 September 1973. See also, McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 115-27.

[31] McGovern, quoted in McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 112.

[32] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016. See also, Jean Westwood, *Madame Chair: The Political Autobiography of an Unintentional Pioneer* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007).

a coup against the New Politics or their reforms.[33] As chair of the party in the absence of a sitting Democratic president, Strauss assumed full responsibility for healing a party whose divisions were as bad if not worse than in 1968. While in the aftermath of that disaster, then-chair O'Brien had felt compelled to seek unity through reform, Strauss approached the same problem in the spirit of pragmatism, which would seek out middle-of-the-road compromises on virtually everything. From his perspective, to launch an intraparty campaign against all the reforms that had come in the wake of the 1968 crisis was sure to sabotage any hope of winning the White House in 1976. Ironically, while liberal reformers in and around the party had blanched at the election of a conservative "old pol" to the national leadership, it would be the inflexible anti-reformers like Barkan and Meany who would in their frustration come to rue the day they put Strauss in the DNC chair. According to his special assistant on party reform, Mark Siegel, Strauss's middle-of-the-road strategy, which ultimately tempered the reform movement, was so effective precisely because of Barkan's polarizing, "irrational" intransigence, quoting Strauss as having once said, "if Al Barkan didn't exist, we would have had to invent him."[34]

Still, with the overthrow of Westwood and the installation of a decidedly regular member of the party establishment in the leadership, the anti-reform forces represented by the Coalition for a Democratic Majority signaled to all observers that a new path was being charted for the party, one which even if not a return to the status quo ante was nonetheless a step back from the New Politics agenda. Some reformers, such as Westwood's aide Alan Baron, attempted to sustain the reform movement by setting up a

---

[33] Strauss, quoted in McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 134.
[34] Interview with Mark Siegel (phone), 15 April 2016. Siegel also recalls Strauss expressing the same sentiment about reform advocate Alan Baron in McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 135.

shadow DNC staff operation called the Democratic Planning Group to monitor what

many considered to be Strauss's secret plan to scuttle the reforms. Such watchdog efforts

did prove valuable to those reformers who still sought to extract a national party charter

from the new reform commission mandated by the 1972 convention and appointed by

Westwood before her departure. But the CDM's victory in the battle for the party chair

was "just the first skirmish" in their war against the New Politics.[35] And the sudden shift

in momentum away from the reformers portended further contests over the direction of

reform.

Reforming the Reforms: Delegate Selection Redux

The battle for leadership of the national committee had been the first front in the CDM's

struggle to retake the party from the New Politics. The second and third fronts were the

new reform commissions mandated by the Miami convention. These included, on the one

hand, a charter commission to formulate the party's first-ever constitution, codifying its

rules and structure, to be offered for approval to a special midterm party conference

scheduled for 1974. On the other hand, the convention had also approved a successor to

the McGovern-Fraser Commission to make further changes to the delegate selection

process. While both fronts in the intraparty battle unfolded simultaneously, the latter,

which wrapped up its work first, will be discussed initially.

Both intraparty groups, reformers and anti-reformers, had reasons to support the

Rules Committee's call, issued at the 1972 convention in Miami Beach, for revisiting the

new delegate selection guidelines following the elections. Those who were opposed to

the reform agenda were alarmed at the astronomical rise of credentials challenges seen

---

[35] Ben Wattenberg, quoted in Broder, "New Democratic Coalition."

between 1968 and 1972. While the Credentials Committee had been adequately prepared to handle the workload, beginning their sessions well in advance of the convention's scheduled opening of ceremonies, reform advocates and critics alike were keenly aware of the political and partisan nature of the credentials disputes. Competition for the nomination was seen as spilling over into the ostensibly neutral business of convention governance, jeopardizing the stability of the convention as well as the legitimacy of its proceedings. Under these conditions, party regulars strongly supported making further revisions to the delegate selection guidelines that could provide some semblance of a smooth and nonpartisan process in resolving qualification disputes.

On the other hand, reformers, while having scored many victories in their credentials challenges before the convention Committee in Miami Beach, were dissatisfied with having to bring the challenges at all. The process was for them also time consuming, fraught with difficulty, and distracting from the main task at hand in a nominating convention: supporting their candidate of choice. Reformers therefore favored reopening the delegate selection rules in order to *strengthen* affirmative action guidelines and foreclose future resistance or ignorance of its mandate. This implied creation of a new intraparty body akin to a judicial council to monitor state level compliance, which fit well with reformers' emphasis on fair application of universal standards and due process of party law.[36]

Reformers' support for a new delegate selection reform commission was most clearly articulated in the position taken by the ADA, now under the leadership of prominent New Politics advocates Donald Fraser and Anne Wexler. In their August 1973

---

[36] See the Summary Report of the Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure, Milwaukie Regional Hearing, 8-9 June 1973, Box 149.G.8.6F, Folder: State Charter Hearings, Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN.

report *Let Us Continue*, the ADA's Political Reform Task Force held that "the Democratic Party was well served by the McGovern-Fraser Commission." Indeed, "we remain convinced," the report affirmed, "that the cure for the defects of democracy is not return of power to the few; the cure for the defects of democracy is more democracy." They advocated extending the "reasonable relationship" doctrine informing the affirmative action guidelines for women, youth, and racial minorities to "all party affairs" beyond those of the national convention, such as state and local party committees. The ADA also recommended changing the basis of the "reasonable relationship" criterion from "presence in the state's population" to "presence in the state's Democratic electorate" – a provision that would put the historic 1972 convention's 15 percent representation of African Americans below their 20-25 percent composition of Democratic voters.[37]

Unlike the appointment of the McGovern-Fraser Commission in the aftermath of the 1968 party crisis, the creation of the new Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure (named the Mikulski Commission for its chair, Baltimore city councilor Barbara Mikulski) drew the keen attention of all party actors. Because both reformers and their opponents had an interest in reworking the guidelines of *Mandate for Reform*, the balance of power inside the commission was a matter of great importance. In light of the convention mandate to appoint the new commission within sixty days, Jean Westwood, immediately after taking office at the helm of the Democratic National Committee, began

---

[37] Americans for Democratic Action, *Let Us Continue: A Report on the Democratic Party's Delegate Selection Guidelines*, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection 1971, Fraser Papers. See also, Testimony of Congressman Donald M. Fraser, National Chairman of Americans for Democratic Action, Mikulski Commission, 11 August 1973, Box 13, Folder 11: Delegate Selection Committee 1973, Mildred Jeffrey Collection, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

laying the groundwork with the help of Bill Dodds of the United Auto Workers (UAW),

then-newly appointed executive director of the DNC, as well as Alan Baron. To counter

accusations of pro-reform bias and to establish her legitimacy as a neutral arbiter,

Westwood tried to balance the Commission with appointments from all party factions,

including its two co-chairs Barbara Mikulski, whose Polish extraction was a gesture to

the allegedly excluded white ethnics, and UAW president Leonard Woodcock, who was

decidedly pro-reform but could counter accusations of anti-laborism. (Woodcock would

subsequently resign as co-chair due to his union responsibilities.) However, following

Westwood's ouster, and under pressure from Barkan, Strauss appointed an additional

twenty-five members to the already fifty-member Commission, including eight

recommended by Barkan himself, diluting the strength of the New Politics bloc. In fact,

according to internal AFL-CIO records, Barkan had identified the original composition of

the Mikulski Commission as "our problem child," and demanded that Strauss "increase

its membership up to 100 or more." "This addition will make them [the reformers]

scream but we have to be prepared to take the heat."[38]

But Strauss was not interested in "taking the heat," and Barkan's desire to see the

new Commission transformed into a vehicle for the outright abolition of the McGovern-

Fraser guidelines was soon frustrated. Over the course of 1973, the Mikulski Commission

reexamined the delegate selection reforms, heard testimony from experts witnesses, party

officials, and outside interest groups. And while intractable anti-reformers like Barkan

were remarkably unsuccessful in influencing its outcome, those in the CDM, who were

---

[38] Strategy Memo, n.d., Box 43, Folder: Democratic National Committee, 1972, AFL-CIO Records. See also, Broder, "Labor Exerting New Muscle."

able to frame their attack on the New Politics as a version of reform, had a significant impact on the process.

The main vehicle through which the CDM influenced the Mikulski Commission was its Task Force on Democratic Rules and Structure, chaired by James O'Hara and Richard Schifter, but also including Ranney, Kemble, Kirkpatrick, Decter, and Wattenberg, among others. While the Task Force would produce many specific recommendations for altering delegate selection guidelines, they defined their purpose more broadly as correcting the "underlying mistake" in the "very goal of reform": providing greater party representation "for those who participate."[39] This goal, they argued, was problematic.

> In 1972, there were more Democrats who did not participate in delegate selection than there were who did. … Those who did participate were the more educated and the more affluent, the more motivated and the more animated – but they manifestly did not constitute an accurate cross-section of Democrats. This proved disastrous for the party.[40]

To prevent a recurrence of McGovern's landslide defeat in 1976, they argued, the party should either design new processes "in which most Democrats will indeed participate" or, instead, "assure inclusion" for "large numbers of elected officials and leaders of major constituent organizations" who "represent significant blocs of rank-and-file voters."[41] That the CDM never seriously proposed or even considered the former option indicates which direction in which they preferred the party to move. From their perspective, the disempowerment of party leaders, especially those at the state and local

---

[39] CDM Task Force on Party Rules, "Statement of Purpose," Box 48, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Affirmative Action 1, O'Hara Collection.
[40] Task Force, "Statement of Purpose," O'Hara Collection.
[41] Task Force, "Statement of Purpose," O'Hara Collection.

level, as well as labor leaders, had resulted in an unpopular and unrepresentative nominee. The logic was as follows:

> The function of the Democratic Party, beyond its usefulness as a mechanism to be periodically employed in political campaigns, is that of brokerage of the various interests which in successful times have made up the Democratic electorate. The party leaders, men with experience and a serious stake in winning elections, try to see that candidates and positions are put forward which are appealing to all elements. This process of compromise takes place at meetings of party bodies at which more or less sophisticated leaders of all blocs are present, and at which they are able to engage in give-and-take. Certain types of reformers are morally offended at this process, yet a case can be made that the smoke-filled rooms in which these crucial compromises have been hammered out can be [considered] among the most vital of America's democratic institutions.[42]

Leaders and officeholders, whether representatives of parties or trade unions, had the institutional incentive to represent the mainstream values of those who put them in office, so it followed that if it was impractical to have mass participation in presidential selection, the second best option was to have a process controlled by those who were charged with picking a consensus candidate to appeal to their own constituents. Their proposed solution was to re-empower those leaders.

In late April 1973, just after the Mikulski Commission's deliberations had gotten underway, the CDM Task Force released a comprehensive report evaluating and critiquing the McGovern-Fraser guidelines. *Fairness and Unity for '76* claimed two "profound misconceptions" embedded in the delegate selection guidelines were responsible for the electoral disaster witnessed that past November. The first was that "democracy could rightfully be measured by the application of pre-set standards to the

---

[42] Memo from Penn Kemble to CDM Task Force on Democratic Party Structure, "Justification of a Mixed System in Selecting Delegates to Democratic Conventions," 15 March 1973, Box 42, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, 1973-1974, AFL-CIO Records.

outcome of a political process." The second was the reforms' "bias toward 'participatory' over 'representative' democracy," which had resulted in the "over-representation" of activist participants of the "so-called grassroots."[43] The first misconception, they argued, amounted to "democracy by administrative fiat," while the second lent itself to "serious abuses of democratic principles" such as caucus packing, endless meetings, and disloyal delegates.[44]

In sharp contrast to the polarizing approach of Al Barkan, the CDM struck a more conciliating tone, with the very first sentence of their report declaring, "most of the reform must be kept." Indeed, the Task Force hailed the work of the McGovern-Fraser Commission for making "sound improvements" to an at times opaque presidential nominating system. However, unlike those who made explicit arguments against the reforms in favor of "turning back the clock," the CDM employed the same rhetoric of democratic participation used by the New Politics movement, and turned it against what they considered to be its unrepresentative consequences. The wedge issue deployed in their democratic critique of party democratization was *demographic quotas*.

The CDM's attack on the party's affirmative action guidelines for women, racial minorities, and people under thirty reflected in microcosm the wider neoconservative reaction to the policy victories of the 1960s social movements. Since 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson, in issuing Executive Order 11246, had declared that "freedom is not enough" and urged US policymakers to pursue equality not only "as a right and a theory" but "as a fact and a result," many vital center liberals had grown increasingly

---

[43] Coalition for a Democratic Majority Press Release, "CDM Calls for Changes in McGovern-Fraser Guidelines," 26 April 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.

[44] *Towards Fairness and Unity for '76: A Review of the McGovern-Fraser Delegate Selection Guidelines*, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 1971, Fraser Papers.

skeptical and ultimately hostile to race- or gender-conscious policymaking, which they felt violated principles of equal opportunity and meritocratic achievement at the core of American political culture.[45] Critiques such as these were especially popular among neoconservative Jewish intellectuals, for whom quotas had restricted access to Ivy League educations for generations. The American Jewish Committee-funded *Commentary Magazine*, under the editorial authority of CDMer Norman Podhoretz, became an important vehicle for disseminating increasingly hostile critiques of the welfare state, second-wave feminism, student activism, and Black Power. The polarization around race and gender-conscious discourse strained and often cleaved the New Deal alliance between Jews and African Americans. Urban sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a Catholic, but closely associated with the neoconservative crowd, put it bluntly in a 1968 *Atlantic* essay, when he wrote, "If ethnic quotas are to be imposed on American universities and similarly quasi-public institutions, it is Jews who will be almost driven out."[46]

The New Politics reforms, *Towards Fairness and Unity* argued, were themselves a violation of basic principles of democratic process and equitable representation. While the authors were careful to stress that they were not opposed to increasing participation by women, blacks, or youth, they believed that "under-represented groups [will] win real victories only when they have organized themselves to win elections." The affirmative action guidelines, with their extraordinarily strong *prima facie*, "reasonable relationship" language, in fact only benefited the "new class" of white collar elites. "Quota

---

[45] Johnson, quoted in Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening the American Workplace* (New York: Russell Sage, 2006), 5.
[46] Moynihan, quoted in Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 58. For the polarization of American Jews on affirmative action policy, see MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough*, 185-224.

representation and other forms of administered 'democracy' ultimately lead to greater influence for quota-makers, and not for the groups in whose interests they purport to speak." Democracy inside the party can only mean "open and fair" processes, not a "guaranteed outcome" according to "rather arbitrary biological categories" of race, sex, and age. Why not also extend special provisions for labor, poor people, working class people, senior citizens, and others? "Democracy by demography" would not only be "absurdly unworkable," it would "gravely undermine the democratic process itself."[47]

The quota guidelines, the report continued, should be abolished, along with the ban on automatic delegate status for Democratic officeholders and the prohibition of closed slate making. To better bring the party professionals back in, the report recommended raising the limit on party committee appointment from 10 to 30 percent of state delegations. The goal, they wrote, must be to "reconstitute" the "broad coalition" of "all Americans with an interest in progressive social change," including the "newly awakened blacks and browns, the women, the young, and the intellectuals," but also the blue collar workers, the southern moderates, the white ethnic, the business community, farmers, and many others. Such a "complex alliance" requires the "skilled and experienced leaders" who "know what it takes to bring the various groups together" and possess the "web of relationships which enables them to do so." In the end, they concluded, "our proposals will restore the democratically chosen leaders to their proper place" in the Democratic Party.

The CDM distributed copies of *Towards Fairness and Unity* to all members of the Mikulski Commission and orchestrated supportive testimony from over forty CDM-

---

[47] All quotes are from *Towards Fairness and Unity*, Fraser Papers.

affiliated experts at eight of the Commission's regional hearings.[48] O'Hara also circulated

the report among members of the Democratic House Caucus, many of whom responded

with enthusiasm. Unsurprisingly, House Democrats hailed the CDM's proposed

restoration of their automatic delegate status. As one appreciative colleague put it in a

letter to the Task Force co-chair:

> I have never been able to understand why Members of Congress must
> compete in the political market place to be entitled to Convention
> membership. We fight the political battle day in and day out, year in and
> year out. That should qualify us to play a role in the Presidential selection
> system.[49]

Restoration of automatic delegate status for elected officeholders also found traction

among many reformers stung by the bite of defeat, such as Lawrence O'Brien who wrote

a post-election memo to all Democratic officeholders and members of the DNC saying,

"we must immediately give full attention to re-enlisting the confidence of traditional

Democrats and others who did not support our national ticket."[50] But it was the CDM's

use of quotas as the wedge issue that was most effective. Indeed, quotas as such found

virtually no public defenders. New Politics enthusiast Jack Newfield, for instance,

accepted the reductio ad absurdum argument against the logic of affirmative action,

writing in the *Village Voice* that "the McGovern reform guidelines created quotas for

women, youths, and blacks but none for poor people, senior citizens or ethnic minorities

---

[48] These numbers are reported in *CDM Notes*, December 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, By-Laws, Minutes, Etc., O'Hara Collection.
[49] Representative Bill Burlison to James O'Hara, 19 May 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.
[50] Memo from Lawrence O'Brien to all DNC Members, Governors, Senators, Representatives, 10 November 1972, Box 241, Folder: McGovern/Shriver Campaign, 1972, Lawrence O'Brien Papers, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, MA.

– Irish, Italian, Polish."[51] Even George McGovern, in an opening address to the sibling Charter Commission in April 1973, appeared to accept the arguments of the CDM when he said, "I believe delegates should represent people – not types of people."[52]

Reformers responded by defending the guidelines in question as *affirmative action* policies in contrast to *quotas*. In testimony before the Mikulski Commission, Donald Fraser said that the CDM's "use of the word 'quota' is a deliberate attempt to mislead."[53] While the affirmative action guidelines did shift the burden of proof to accused delegations that failed to "reasonably reflect" the proportion of women, youth, and blacks in the state population, he pointed out that all state delegations had to do was show that meaningful, good faith efforts to recruit these groups made been made. In a sharp rebuke to McGovern, Frances Farenhold, chair of the NWPC, warned, "it is crucial that the Democratic Party not overreact to the defeat of its national ticket" by "retreat[ing] and abandon[ing] the substantial gains made in 1972." "Fairness dictates that we be represented in proportion to our numbers in the population."[54] Bill Dodds echoed a similar sentiment in the wake of McGovern's defeat, noting in a letter to UAW president Leonard Woodcock,

> the party would be committing a grave error in the hysteria of the moment to throw out the baby with the bath water. … [I]t is crucial at this point for the focus of discussion to turn to making the guidelines work better. The danger in merely attacking the existence of so-called "quotas" is that while

---

[51] Newfield, quoted in Stephen Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces for Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 14.

[52] Remarks of Senator George McGovern Before Opening Session of the Charter Commission, 10 April 1973, Box 13, Folder: Democratic Charter Commission 1973, Jeffrey Collection.

[53] ADA Chair Donald Fraser, Testimony before the Mikulski Commission, 11 August 1973, Box 13, Folder 11: Delegate Selection Committee 1973, Jeffrey Collection.

[54] Frances Farenhold to George McGovern, 17 April 1973, Box 281, Folder 43: Delegate Selection Project, NWPC Records.

in reality only a myth is being destroyed, the clear impression is that reform is being rejected.[55]

Still others, such as Eli Segal, pointed to what many New Politics advocates considered to be the hypocrisy of the CDM and its supporters in calling for the "abolition of so-called quotas for *some* Democratic groups" only to replace them with "quotas for *other* Democratic groups," namely party officials and officeholders.[56]

Some New Politics supporters, however, sat on the fence, rejecting the logic of the anti-quota argument but sensing that sacrifices needed to be made to rebuild a viable political party. This was most pronounced among the progressive labor leaders who had backed the reform process as various stages. Communication Workers president and member of the Mikulski Commission Joseph Beirne, who had come to the aid of McGovern in 1972, said that the CDM's attacks on "quotas" and "elitism" demonstrated a "lack of understanding" on their part. But while he defended affirmative action from its attackers, Beirne did accept the need to bring party officials back into the process, and endorsed the CDM's proposed increase from 10 to 30 percent in the proportion of state committee appointments to convention delegations.[57] Even the UAW's Bill Dodds saw the potential liabilities of pushing too hard for further reform in the aftermath of such a devastating defeat. As he told the *Washington Post*,

---

[55] Bill Dodds to Leonard Woodcock, 6 December 1972, Box 197, Folder 4: DNC Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure 1972-73, Leonard Woodcock Collection, Reuther Library.

[56] Testimony of Eli Segal Before the Mikulski Commission, Box 13, Folder: Democratic Charter Commission, 1973, Jeffrey Collection (emphasis added). The logic of Segal's argument is found in inverted form in Byron Shafer's text, where he writes, "the [McGovern-Fraser] reforms abolished ex-officio seats to reward party service and introduced ex-officio seats to recognize demographic categories." Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 526. However, by labeling the affirmative action guidelines as conferring a "right of office" for specific demographic groups does much to misconstrue the intentions of the reformers.

[57] Joseph A. Beirne, *Delegate Selection: A Report to the Democratic Party Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure*, Box 149.G.8.6F, Folder: Commission on Party Structure 1973, Fraser Papers.

We haven't fought as hard for every tactical advantage. … We have tried not to factionalize the party, and that may prove to be a fatal error on our part. …[But] to me, it seems dangerous for one segment of the labor movement to be as involved in one party as Barkan and COPE are today. There is no precedent for this. In a day and age when you're trying to keep political structures open to the public, it leaves you open to retribution from those who are not sympathetic to labor. I am afraid that if any labor leader leans too hard on people, you will have a backlash.[58]

In the fall of 1973, the Mikulski Commission issued its report, *Democrats All*, which issued new delegate selection guidelines binding on all state parties for the 1976 national convention. From one perspective, its findings deepened the effect of the McGovern-Fraser reforms: it banned winner-take-all mechanisms, this time including California's primary, and specified the use of proportional representation of candidate support in all caucuses and primaries. But from another perspective, it decisively weakened the McGovern-Fraser reforms: while the Commission retained affirmative action guidelines in name, it specified that such a goal "shall not be accomplished either directly or indirectly by the Party's imposition of mandatory quotas." It further shifted the burden of proof back to the plaintiffs in anti-discrimination credentials challenges and removed the *prima facie* clause from the guidelines. Thus, "if a State Party had adopted and implemented an approved Affirmative Action Program, the Party shall not be subject to challenge based solely on delegate composition or primary results."[59] Credentials contests would themselves be removed from the politicized environments of the national convention and be overseen by a 17-member Compliance Review Commission (CRC), to be appointed by the full DNC, its chair, and the chair of the Delegate Selection

---

[58] Dodds, quoted in Broder, "Organized Labor Exerting New Muscle."
[59] *Democrats All: A Report of the Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure*, Box 27, Folder 27, Charter Commission, Jeffrey Collection.

Commission. Additionally, *Democrats All* increased state committee appointments from 10 to 25 percent, reinstated automatic but not voting status for Democratic officeholders, and reinstated closed proceedings for slate making. The combined effects of the dissipation of the movements of the late 1960s on the one hand, and the greater room for maneuver given to state parties to balance their delegations through committee appointments on the other, would dramatically reduce the number of credentials contests at the 1976 convention, bringing the number of challenges down from 118 in 1972 to only fifty, with no minority reports – a result that CRC chair Robert Wagner later referred to as "a political miracle."[60]

FIGURE 7.1: Demographic Composition of Democratic National Conventions, 1968-1980 (%)
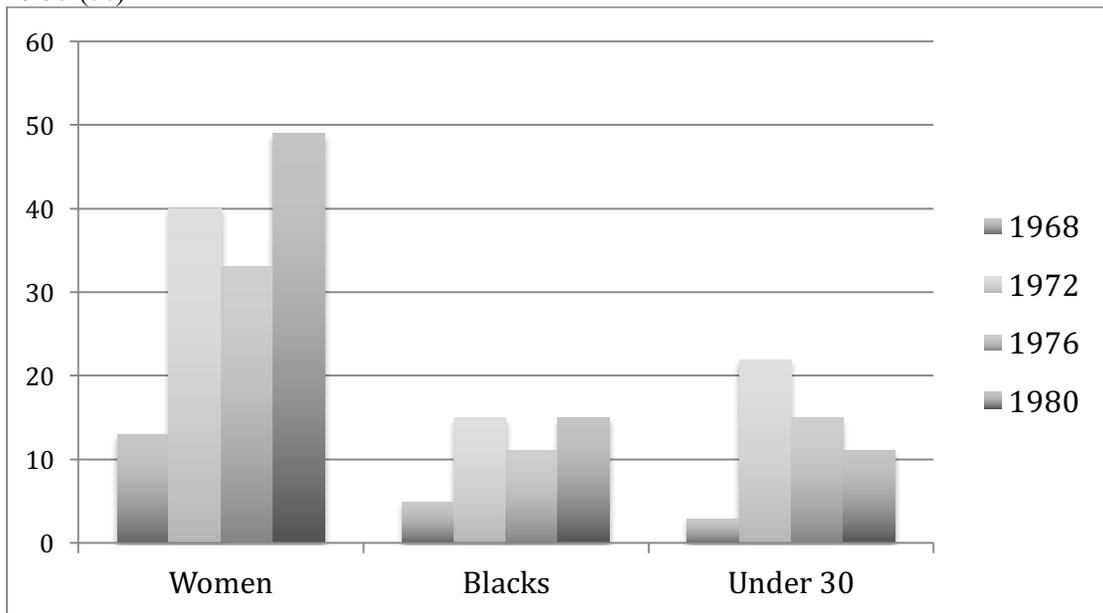
Source: Crotty, *Party Reform*, 136.

---

[60] *Official Proceedings of the 1976 Democratic National Convention* (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1976), 204. For discussion of the CRC, see Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 264. The near absence of serious credentials contests in 1976 was also due to the absence of any serious challengers to presumptive nominee Governor Jimmy Carter.

As Figure 7.1 shows, all three categories of affirmative action specified by the McGovern-Fraser Commission – women, African Americans, and people under thirty – saw slight declines in the proportion of delegate seats at the national convention in 1976. While the Mikulski Commission's scaling back of the *prima facie* clause and shifting the burden of credentials challenges back on to plaintiffs probably had some role in diminishing the participation of women, blacks, and youth in the national conventions, it is more likely the case that their diminished presence *inside* the party was a product of the ebb and flow of the social movements *outside* the party. This better explains the differential pattern evident across the three affirmative action groups: while the women's movement continued to grow through the 1970s and elements of the civil rights movement became more deeply embedded with establishment politics, the youth movement of the late 1960s failed to sustain itself.

In sum, the CDM's influence on the final product of the Mikulski Commission was unmistakable and significant. While they did not win all concessions they felt were necessary – Barkan was especially incensed that the report banned "mandatory quotas" but not what he called "voluntary quotas" – *Democrats All* made special reference to the "quota controversy" in the explanation of its decisions. Indeed, the structure of the report even paralleled closely the structure of *Towards Fairness and Unity in '76*.

Many observers have interpreted the Mikulski Commission to have been as nearly pro-reform as the McGovern-Fraser Commission that preceded it, and therefore something of a failure for the CDM and other members of the anti-reform coalition. As party reformer and scholar William Crotty has put it, "the questions debated were on the

content of the rules, not their existence."[61] But aside from the rather exceptional case of Barkan, few anti-reforms attempted to question the "existence" of the rules as such. The genius of the CDM and the reason for its effectiveness was in *not challenging the rules, but in modifying their content*. This had an immediate, tactical effect in shifting the very terms of debate to issues that divided reformers. As New Politics advocate Lanny Davis wrote to a sympathetic Mikulski commissioner, "we've been given a bum wrap [sic] on the quota issue. We've let the CDM and Mr. Strauss shift the debate from the legitimate issue – the responsibility of state Party organizations to open up … to the issue of a numerical quota."[62] Moreover, rather than returning to the status quo ante, the CDM's redirection of party reform *employed the newfound authority of the national party*, as embodied in the Mikulski Commission, to codify new rules favorable to party professionals and labor leaders, institutionalizing arrangements of intraparty power that weakened the New Politics movement. As we will see in the next section, the CDM effected a very similar outcome in the third venue of contestation: the battle over the party charter.

Democratic Chartism and its Discontents

Operating concurrently with the Mikulski Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure was the Charter Commission, chaired by former North Carolina, "New South" governor and Duke University president Terry Sanford. As mandated by the 1972 convention, it was tasked with working out in detail a constitution for the Democratic Party that codified its governing structures, relations of authority, and operating

---

[61] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 230.
[62] Lanny Davis to Mildred Jeffrey, 5 April 1973, Box 30, Folder 15, Jeffrey Collection.

procedures, as well as planning a 1974 midterm national conference on Democratic Party organization and policy at which the charter would be presented for approval. As we have seen, the question of national party structure and authority had been a pressing concern of the New Politics reform movement from the outset. Indeed, many saw the need to strengthen the central authority of the national party as the natural complement of greater openness at the grassroots. While CDM-inspired critics of the New Politics have asserted an inherent antithesis between "opening the party" and "strengthening the party," it was more often the case that reformers opposed what James MacGregor Burns called the "old *personalismo* politics" that party decentralization gave to local and state party chairs and officeholders. [63] In fact, outside several exceptional cities such as Chicago, party organization was almost nonexistent aside from the personalized apparatuses built by party candidates and officeholders. In many ways a return to the responsible party doctrine laid out by the American Political Science Association's 1950 Party Committee report, the national party charter was the Democrats' "opportunity of a lifetime" to build "a more coherent, unified, issue-minded, representative national party."[64]

Unsurprisingly, as the most ambitious element within the New Politics imaginary, the proposal for a party charter aroused a significant amount of hostility from stakeholders with vested interests in the loose structure of party federalism. The Charter Commission's very reason for being was due to the opposition led by the Association for State Democratic Chairs (ASDC) to the Fraser-O'Hara draft circulated in the run-up to the 1972 Miami convention. As a compromise within the Rules Committee, the charter had already been stripped of its proposals for a national dues-paying membership as well

---

[63] James MacGregor Burns, "The Democrats' Opportunity," *The New Republic*, 21 July 1973.
[64] Burns, "The Democrats' Opportunity," 20.

as a new regional substructure to better integrate national and local party governance. Loath to see a new layer of distant administrators meddling in local affairs from Washington, members of the ASDC demanded the integration of all state party chairs and vice chairs in a vastly expanded DNC as the price for their support of a Charter Commission.[65]

Still, the draft with which the Charter Commission began its deliberations in the spring of 1973 had a number of very controversial proposals in it, including: holding mandatory midterm policy conferences between presidential conventions; extending affirmative action programs to "all party affairs," including in state and local party organizations; establishing a nine-member judicial council modeled on the Supreme Court to adjudicate intraparty rules disputes; and instating four-year terms of service for the DNC chair, to be elected by the party membership at midterm conferences.[66] While many party actors were opposed to the charter's intention to create a national, policy-oriented party, there was no option to drop the proposal altogether, as they would have preferred. As Strauss liked to joke, "I am not the father" of the charter idea, "and I would admit to you that I'm not Catholic [but] I would have practiced a little more birth control if I were father to this child."[67] Upon inheriting the mandated Commission from the deposed Westwood, Strauss appointed an additional fifty-five members to the already large 105-member body, as he had done with the Mikulski Commission, to better "balance" its composition and dilute the strength of the reformers. He also assigned his special assistant Mark Siegel, a student of the McGovern-Fraser Commission, as staff

---

[65] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016.
[66] For a comparison of African American populations at the state level and their presence on state party committees, see Democratic Planning Group, No. 19, 15 March 1974, Box 32, Folder 25: Democratic Party 1967-74, Jeffrey Collection.
[67] Strauss, quoted in McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 153.

director on the Charter Commission and to function as Strauss's "transmission agent" for his views within its proceedings.[68]

In a related initiative, Strauss also moved to blunt the appeal of the New Politics' emphasis on developing the national party's policymaking capacities by reviving Paul Butler's idea for a policy council inside the DNC. However, while Hubert Humphrey's similar initiative in 1969 had incubated many of the New Politics planks that ended up in the 1972 party platform, Strauss explicitly closed the body to "outside" influence, naming his creation the Democratic Advisory Council of Elected Officials (DACEO). The Council included eleven senators, twenty-one House members, ten governors, nine mayors, and twenty state, county or local party officials.[69] By insisting that "only the Democratic Advisory Council is authorized to make official policy declarations," Strauss made a strong gesture of reassurance to those who feared that national party policy would become a vehicle for the New Politics forces, which they saw as an electoral liability.[70] As one AFL-CIO executive testified before the Charter Commission, "the only policy which makes any sense is that policy which wins elections."[71] The DACEO held occasional meetings, often in the private residences of its members, producing so little in the way of public policy alternatives that journalist David Broder lamented the "almost comic futility" of its efforts.[72]

Strauss's primary goal within the Charter Commission, to avoid any messy confrontation that could harm the party's future electoral fortunes, was aided by events in

---

[68] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016; Interview with Mark Siegel (phone), 15 April 2016.

[69] McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 162; Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 129-30.

[70] DACEO Interim Report, Box 196, Folder 14: Democratic Advisory Council of Elected Officials, 1974, Woodcock Collection.

[71] Milwaukee Regional Hearing, Box 149.G.8.6F, Folder: State Charter Hearings, Fraser Papers.

[72] David S. Broder, "Filling the Democratic Policy Gap," *Washington Post*, 13 February 1974.

the wider political climate. The full Charter Commission met five times between April 1973 and August 1974, while also conducting many state level hearings akin to the public events held by the McGovern-Fraser and Mikulski Commissions. However, due to the uniqueness of the issue at hand – an ongoing constitutional convention for America's oldest party – as well as the spiraling Watergate controversy enveloping the Nixon administration, the charter drew far less public attention than had the McGovern-Fraser Commission in the wake of the 1968 Chicago crisis. Ironically, the very intention of the charter authors to construct an "in-between-conventions" national party organization, separate and distinguishable from its candidates and officeholders, contributed to the lack of popular interest. New Politics reformers could not compensate for the absence of any centralizing public figures, such as prospective presidential candidates, who could galvanize rank-and-file Democrats' attention over a contest for office. The effect of this general disinterest toward the proceedings of the Charter Commission, no doubt due in part to the devastating McGovern loss in 1972, was not lost on reformer Anne Wexler, who noted the uphill terrain she and other New Politics advocates faced: "the fight is between doing nothing and [making] real substantive changes."[73]

In this atmosphere the CDM spearheaded the charge to outflank the New Politics in the making of the party charter. Under the direction of Josh Muravchik, the CDM developed a second special task force, the Charter Conference Clearing House, to mobilize support for a modified party constitution that could "redirect and realign our

---

[73] Quoted in Carl P. Leubsdorf, "Democrats Risk Charter Split," *Washington Star-News*, 17 June 1973, Box 47, Folder: Democratic Party, Charter Commission, Correspondence, July – December 1973, O'Hara Collection.

party" away from the New Politics.[74] From the perspective of those on the Task Force, the mandated 1974 midterm party conference presented a potentially "constructive" opportunity, depending on whether the "responsible forces" in the Democratic Party could properly "influence the Charter debate."[75]

Prior to the content of the charter becoming the central matter of dispute were the issues of the agenda, composition, and timing of the midterm party conference, which would meet in 1974 to ratify the final document. After the initial meeting in Washington, DC, in April 1973 had left many members of the New Politics feeling somewhat reassured of Strauss's good faith efforts in playing a neutral role, the second Charter Commission meeting in Fort Collins in July proved that the anti-reformers held the balance of power.[76] Leading a bloc of southern Democrats, AFL-CIO operatives, and traditional party leaders, CDM leader Representative Tom Foley narrowly passed a resolution 52-50 limiting the midterm conference to consider "only the recommendations for restructuring the Democratic Party," prohibiting discussion of party program or public policy – the very rationale for which charter proponents had proposed holding regular midterm conferences in the first place. Foley, however, framed his resolution as eminently pro-charter, telling the Commission that because "the task of restructuring the party is enormously important," permitting issues debates could open up the possibility of sabotage by those would attempt to divide the party.[77] Evelyn Dubrow, another member of the CDM on the Charter Commission, concurred, telling the *New York Times* that "the

---

[74] Coalition for a Democratic Majority, *Unity Out of Diversity*, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Papers on Party Charter, O'Hara Collection.
[75] Confidential Memo from Penn Kemble to undisclosed recipients, n.d., Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.
[76] See Letter from Mildred Jeffrey to Terry Sanford, 13 April 1973, Box 13, Folder: Democratic Charter Commission, 1973, Jeffrey Collection.
[77] James P. Sterba, "Democrats Vote to Limit '74 Meeting," *New York Times*, 23 July 1973.

Democratic Party is not afraid to discuss issues," it was simply a matter of getting the "vital work" of the charter complete before such discussion could commence.[78] Chairman Sanford also agreed that the vote, while narrow, was a positive development in the Commission's proceedings, saying that it was not a question of papering over differences, but "a question of the proper time and setting."[79]

But if there was a more appropriate time and place for discussing public policy within the party than at its official conference *on party organization and policy*, as the 1972 convention mandate had called for, few New Politics liberals could locate it. Indeed, many saw a desperate need for intraparty deliberation on program, not simply to promote "issues" within party politics generally, but as a direct response to what Donald Fraser referred to as "a major crisis" of "erosion of public confidence in our political parties."[80] The twin crises in American presidential politics, from Lyndon Johnson's "credibility gap" regarding Vietnam to Nixon's unfolding Watergate scandal, had for many reformers renewed the impetus behind the need for a party organization that could function as an "instrument of accountability" between officeholders and the public.[81] It was with this vision of the party's future in mind that New York state Democratic chair Joseph Crangle, who had led the floor fight for the peace plank at the Chicago convention in 1968, told the Fort Collins meeting that they were "putting blinders on" the party by striking policy discussion from the conference agenda, preventing the party from speaking with a unified voice about national issues of public concern.[82] Not only would

[78] Sterba, "Democrats Vote to Limit '74 Meeting."
[79] David S. Broder, "Mid-Term Agenda Divides Democrats," *Washington Post*, 23 July 1974.
[80] Letter from Donald Fraser to Lanny Davis, 9 April 1973, Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Letters, Fraser Papers.
[81] Memo from Linda Davidoff to Basil Paterson and Steve Schlossberg, "Midterm Democratic Policy Conference," Box 2, Folder 25: Democratic Platform Committee 1976, Steven Schlossberg Collection, Reuther Library.
[82] Border, "Mid-Term Agenda Divides Democrats."

this policy of quietism not restore public confidence in the Democratic Party, argued a member of the New Democratic Coalition, it would reproduce the same party structure that contributed to the explosion in Chicago: "If you had a policy conference you could dissipate the frustration that builds up now in one day at the platform hearing at the national convention."[83] Patricia Derian, a DNC representative of Mississippi, emphasized the detrimental effects programmatic incoherence was having on partisan identification: "we're losing 10 percent of our members to independents each year," she said.[84]

> Our party is *balkanized*; each elected official stands on his own plank, works in his own area of interest. Our bill of complaints falls on the populace like handfuls of confetti. … What does it mean to anyone anymore to be a Democrat? If it only signifies that one is not a Republican, that is not enough. … A clear statement of intentions is needed.[85]

These protests notwithstanding, a slim majority of the Commission, including Sanford and Strauss, favored scrapping any planned discussion of issues or platform debates for the midterm conference agenda. After the standing vote of 52-50, Sanford rejected calls for a roll call vote, which was sustained by a voice vote. Ironically, for its first-ever conference on party organization and policy, the Democratic Party had deemed all issues of public policy to be irrelevant.

The composition and timing of the midterm conference also created tensions within the Charter Commission, however not along the same lines as those that developed

---

[83] Sterba, "Democrats Vote to Limit '74 Meeting."
[84] Sterba, "Democrats Vote to Limit '74 Meeting."
[85] Letter from Patricia Derian to Robert Strauss, 15 August 1973, Box 185, Folder: (New) Charter Commission 1, October 1973 – September 1974, Neil Staebler Collection, Bentley Historical Library (emphasis added). See also, Hans Schiller to Terry Sanford, 15 August 1973, Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Charter Commission 1973, Fraser Papers.

around the agenda fight. The dilemma facing reformers was that very purpose of midterm conferences was to bring together grassroots party activists with leading party and public officials to articulate responsive party policies and a programmatic agenda. Therefore, even reformers saw the need to suspend the use of the McGovern-Fraser guidelines' ban on automatic delegates in selecting conference participants. The Final Call for the 1974 Conference thus entitled all Democratic governors, senators, and representatives to attend as a right of office.[86] While the total proportion of automatic delegates would not constitute more than 17 percent of the 2,500-person gathering, the restoration of the prohibited practice to elicit the participation of Democratic politicians demonstrated that their conspicuous absence at the 1972 convention in Miami Beach had not gone unnoticed, and that their views, which tended to clash the most with charter enthusiasts, would have a guaranteed voice at the midterm ratification conference.

As for the timing of the conference, upon arrival as DNC chair Strauss signaled his desire for it to be scheduled at the latest possible date within the convention mandate, providing additional time for the Commission to conduct its business but also placing the event *after* the 1974 midterm elections. For Strauss this was a common sense measure taken to insulate the Democrats' performance at the polls from any possible Chicago-style blowup that might occur at the party conference.[87] Such a schedule, however, was likely to overshadow the charter in significance, leaving it as an afterthought squeezed between what was looking to be a victorious Democratic sweep of the elections and the vacation holidays that followed. For reformers such as Fraser, such a development cut against the intention and "understanding of those who drafted the [charter] proposal" in

---

[86] *The Final Call for the 1974 Conference on Democratic Party Organization and Policy*, Box 185, Folder: Material from July 1973 Meeting of Charter Commission at Fort Collins, Staebler Papers.
[87] Interview with Mark Siegel (phone), 15 April 2016.

the first place.[88] While the decision to cut policy discussion from the conference agenda had already made the point somewhat moot, Fraser and other reformers looked askance at holding an ostensible "rallying function" for the declaration of party principles *after* the relevant elections had occurred.[89] Holding a party conference before the elections, they argued, would provide the public with a clear sense of what the party stood for – a message they believed would improve the party's electoral success.

It was, of course, the preference of the state parties, who were the pivotal actors in those elections, to retain their autonomy to tailor their campaign messages as they saw fit, without the added interference of a novel party policy vehicle. As Robert Vance, president of the Association of State Democratic Chairs (ASDC), reported the sentiment of his organization to Strauss, "the overwhelming preference [regarding the charter conference] is for late November or December. Nearly all reject a summer conference."[90] The Sanford Commission complied, voting to hold the midterm party conference in early December 1974. State party officials, however, were not alone in preferring a late midterm meeting. The Machinists' union, for instance, while strong advocates of the party charter, expressed their fear that a pre-election conference "would take away from our general election efforts" as "many elements within the Party may be devoting more time to electing delegates to this conference … rather than electing Democrats to public office."[91]

---

[88] Letter from Donald Fraser to Thomas Tradup, 27 February 1973, Box 149.G.8.5B, Fraser Papers.

[89] Carol Casey, "The Democratic National Charter and Mid-Term National Conference: A Background Analysis," Box 149.G.8.6F, Folder: Charter Reform Research, Fraser Papers.

[90] Vance to Strauss, Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Letters, Donald Fraser Papers.

[91] Machinists Non-Partisan Political League to Members of the Democratic Party Charter Commission, "Position of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers on Subjects Before the Democratic Party Charter Commission," n.d., Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Letters, Fraser Papers. Compare this to the UAW who preferred a midterm conference "no later than September, 1 1974." Mildred Jeffrey to

While New Politics reformers were dealt setbacks in terms of the charter conference's agenda and timing, when it came to the actual content of the party charter it initially appeared they had the advantage. As we have seen, the CDM and other opponents of the New Politics had embraced the mantle of reform and aimed to redirect it toward institutionalizing arrangements more favorable to party officeholders and labor leaders. Strauss had been instrumental in placing many CDM representatives on the Charter Commission by padding it with a large number of additional appointments. The problem was, however, that as the Commission's proceedings went on through 1973 and on into 1974, the rate of absenteeism among party regulars, many of whom were public officials with other pressing business, increased such that by the time the full Commission convened its March meeting in Washington, DC, the New Politics constituted a slightly dominant voting bloc. As the Commission finalized its first revised draft charter for circulation, New Politics advocates narrowly scored major upset victories codifying in the proposal *mandatory* midterm party conferences, an independent judicial council, and affirmative action programs "in all party affairs."[92] The trend of the meeting, reported one reformer, was "against Strauss (Keefe and Mark Siegel) and toward reform."[93]

The anti-New Politics opposition at the March meeting, led by Al Barkan, COPE operatives, and members of the CDM centered on the provision for mandatory midterm conferences. As Barkan later communicated to George Meany, "this is a mare's nest that

Bill Dodds, "Charter Commission," 23 May 1973, Box 15, Folder 13: Democratic Charter Commission 1973, Jeffrey Collection.

[92] "First Written Rules For the Democrats Won by Reformers," *New York Times*, 18 March 1974. See also, Casey, "Democratic National Charter," Fraser Papers.

[93] Report on Charter Commission, 16-17 March 1974, Box 157, Folder: Democratic National Committee; Draft Charter – 1974 Convention (1972), George McGovern Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

can only provide a forum for the issues and persons who divide the party."[94] However, their alternative proposal, holding optional midterm policy conferences at the discretion of the DNC, failed to carry a majority. As one reformer responded, "those for mandatory conferences believe they must be [mandatory] because if it is left up to the discretion of the DNC they will never happen."[95]

The outcome of the March meeting, carried by the New Politics forces, pushed Barkan to the breaking point with the DNC chair, with whom he had become increasingly frustrated as all his efforts in orchestrating Strauss's installation failed to produce the desired outcome. Feeling he had not been given the due he was owed, by the spring of 1974 Barkan considered backing Strauss for DNC chair to have been "the worst political mistake" he had ever made.[96] In May, the COPE director sent a list of grievances against the party chair to George Meany, alleging that Strauss "has turned his back on us" and that "if Strauss's surrender to the new politics people goes unchallenged, 1976 will give us a repeat of Miami 1972." He advised the AFL-CIO president that "there is no point in trying further to work with Strauss" and that AFL-CIO "should make independent, informal arrangements with friendly governors, senators, mayors, congressmen, state chairmen and others" instead.[97] On Barkan's recommendation, Meany refused a meeting request from Strauss, who downplayed their discord as merely "narrow bickering" and

---

[94] Memo from Al Barkan to George Meany, "Strauss and the DNC," 14 May 1974, COPE Files (unprocessed), AFL-CIO Records.
[95] Report on Charter Commission, McGovern Papers.
[96] Barkan, quoted in Paul R. Wieck, "Chairman Strauss' Hot Seat," *The New Republic*, 20 April 1974.
[97] Barkan to Meany, "Strauss and the DNC," AFL-CIO Records.

promised he would do anything, including "crawl on my belly," to win back the labor

leaders' trust.[98]

The March meeting, however, while encouraging for members of the New

Politics, was not decisive. The Commission would meet again in August to review the

charter proposals agreed on in March for a final vote in December. Strauss, feeling frozen

out by Barkan, and fearing that if a New Politics-influenced charter survived the August

meeting and was sent to the December conference for ratification the gathering could be

engulfed in controversy, moved to preclude such a possibility. He and his staff seized

upon the final Commission meeting in August as the major front in the battle over the

party charter. Weakening the New Politics version of the party constitution at the August

meeting would not only present the midterm conference in December with a fait

accompli – a charter already rendered safe whether it was voted up or down – but also,

Strauss hoped, mend fences with the labor leadership.[99]

Strauss approached the party regulars' attendance problem by dispatching his

special assistant Mark Siegel to pressure those who were unlikely to attend the August

meeting to formally resign their Commission posts altogether, enabling Strauss to appoint

new and more dependable commissioners.[100] Strauss's tactic raised an outcry of protest

from inside and outside the Commission. In an open letter to all DNC executive

members, Fraser charged the chairman with "stacking" the Commission ahead of the

---

[98] DNC Memo from Robert Strauss to George Meany, et al., 14 May 1974, COPE Files (unprocessed), AFL-CIO Records; COPE Memo from Al Barkan to George Meany, 15 May 1974, COPE Files (unprocessed), AFL-CIO Records.
[99] Interview with Mark Siegel (phone), 15 April 2016. See also, Sullivan et al., *Explorations in Convention Decision Making: The Democratic Party in the 1970s* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1976).
[100] See McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 155; and Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 121-2.

August meeting "to maximize the vote for his point of view."[101] Surprisingly, Strauss responded to the charges by acknowledging their veracity, claiming that if the Commission staff had not "'lobbied' [for] the Chairman's point of view … at my specific instruction … they would have been derelict in the execution of their responsibilities."[102] The letter was followed by a number of disgruntled telegrams from other reformers on the Commission as well as a petition sent to Strauss containing the signatures of all major spokespersons of the New Politics movement alleging that "some members of the Charter Commission" were seeking to "overturn the mandates of the 1972 convention."[103] A legal challenge formally lodged against Strauss's actions with the Charter Commission counsel, however, ruled to uphold the DNC chair's power of appointment.[104]

Nor was Strauss the only party official to be alarmed by the outcome of the March meeting. As the chairman worked to ensure a favorable outcome at the upcoming August meeting, the March draft of the charter received a stark rebuke from the Democratic Governors Conference meeting in June. By unanimous decision, the governors struck against the New Politics thrust toward national party supremacy, urging that the charter "not include specific provisions which may be inconsistent with state statutes." The governors also held that due to "changing needs" and "the inability to mandate four years in advance," the mandatory midterm conferences proposal should be altered to read, "the DNC may provide from time to time for such conferences on Democratic policy and

---

[101] Donald Fraser to Executive Committee, 14 August 1974, Box 16, Folder 16: Charter of the Democratic Party 1974, Jeffrey Collection.
[102] Memo from Robert Strauss to Members of the DNC, 3 September 1974, Box 47, Folder: Democratic Party, Charter Commission, Correspondence, 1974, O'Hara Collection.
[103] Letter to Chairman Robert Strauss, 26 September 1974, Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Party Reform, Fraser Papers.
[104] Memo from Anthony Harrington to Charter Commission Members, "Re: Replacement and Substitute Members," 12 August 1974, Box 47, Folder: Democratic Party, Charter Commission, Correspondence, 1974, O'Hara Collection.

organization as it may deem in the interests of the Democratic Party and the people of the United States." The governors' resolution also bristled at the proposal for an independent judicial council to resolve intraparty disputes, instead preferring such power to be "vested in the DNC." Lastly, the resolution recommended that all specifics regarding delegate selection, including proportional representation, be codified in the party's by-laws rather than its constitution.[105] A similar item-by-item attack on the March version of the charter was also sent from over 150 members of the House Democratic Caucus to Charter Commission chair Sanford in July.[106]

The CDM also intervened in the chaotic interregnum between the March and August meetings of the Charter Commission, making a decisive contribution. In July, the CDM's Charter Conference Clearing House released and circulated its critique of the proposed party constitution, entitled *Unity Out of Diversity*.[107] Sensing that the balance of power was slipping back toward the reformers, the Clearing House, under the direction of Muravchik, sought to "orchestrate a scare" among complacent Democrats and labor leaders.[108] The report attacked the New Politics' effort to "centralize, ideologize, and 'Europeanize' the Party in ways that run against the grain of American political tradition and the unique coalitional character of the Democratic Party."[109] Midterm conferences, it alleged, would "probably be unrepresentative and divisive, and could harm the party's

---

[105] Democratic Governors Conference, "Resolution on the Democratic Charter," Box 16, Folder 15: Charter of the Democratic Party 1974, Jeffrey Collection.

[106] Democratic Members of Congress to Terry Sanford, 31 July 1974, Box 16, Folder 15: Charter of the Democratic Party 1974, Jeffrey Collection.

[107] Press Release, "CDM Proposes Broad New Charter for Democratic Party," 22 July 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.

[108] Quoted in Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism*, 95.

[109] Coalition for a Democratic Majority, *Unity Out of Diversity*, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Papers on Party Charter, O'Hara Collection.

electoral appeal."[110] Further, codifying affirmative action guidelines "in all party affairs" would "cast the current set of delegate selection rules into the iron of the charter," making future changes or accommodations rigid and inflexible.[111] Lastly, the CDM attacked the very basis of the New Politics position holding that a more liberal programmatic party would reverse the party's electoral decline and the general distrust of party politics:

> It is unrealistic to talk of the desirability – even the possibility – of a united, liberal "national" party driving out the impure and arousing new converts by trumpeting a sweeping national program. … We should continue to build along the lines of a federative, pluralistic party, in keeping with the character of American politics. … [The charter] should not be seen as a blueprint for the creation of a wholly new party."[112]

Given the increased mobilization of both reformers and their opponents, it is unsurprising that the final drafting session of the party charter exploded in acrimony. Meeting in a two-day session in Kansas City in August, the combined effect of Strauss's ten new appointments, the widespread criticisms of the March charter from Democratic officeholders and the CDM, and a carefully orchestrated whip operation conducted by the CDM's Tom Foley, COPE's John Perkins, and the DNC's Mark Siegel, resulted in decisive defeats for the New Politics: mandatory midterm conferences were revised as optional; delegate selection was removed from the purview of the judicial council, rendering the body largely irrelevant; and the power to select the chair of the DNC was retained by the party's presidential nominee. However, in a surprise to most New Politics

---

[110] "CDM Proposes Broad New Charter for Democratic Party," O'Hara Collection.
[111] Coalition for a Democratic Majority, "Resolution on the Charter," Box 47, Folder: Democratic Party, Charter Commission, Drafts and Background Material 2, O'Hara Collection.
[112] Coalition for a Democratic Majority, "An Analysis of the Draft Charter for the Democratic Party," Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, October 1973 – November 1974, O'Hara Collection.

commissioners, the CDM-led bloc also moved to strike the "all party affairs" language from the affirmative action provisions in the charter and restore the use of the majoritarian unit rule, triggering a walkout of the reformers.[113]

While the Mikulski Commission itself had recently adopted the "all party affairs" language for the 1976 delegation selection process, CDM member James O'Hara attacked its "reasonable reflection" clause as still effectively requiring "implied quotas."[114] Joining the CDM in its opposition to the "all party affairs" language was a bloc of state party officers, led by South Carolina chair Donald Fowler, who opposed what he saw as the overreaching of national party authority into the day-to-day mechanics of local party affairs.[115] "The proposed article," the CDM alleged, "would conscript local officials into an all-consuming national affirmative action crusade, eclipsing the role they should play in electing their candidates, raising money, and building party structure."[116] California assembly member Willie Brown, leading the black caucus on the Charter Commission, accused the Foley resolution of trying to "drive blacks and women out of the party."[117]

The additional resolution to lift the ban on the use of the unit rule and restore winner-take-all mechanisms in presidential selection processes – interpreted by New Politics members as an effort to undo the most important reforms since 1964 – had been

---

[113] In addition to the press coverage cited below, this account of the August Charter Commission meeting is drawn from two participant accounts: Yvonne Brathwaite Burke's Memorandum, Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Party Reform, Fraser Papers; and Josh Muravchik, "The Democrats Divided," *The New Leader*, 16 September 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973 – November 1974, O'Hara Collection.

[114] David S. Broder, "Rift Ends Charter Session," *Washington Post*, 19 August 1974. See also, "Dissidents Leave Democrats' Unit," *New York Times*, 19 August 1974; David S. Broder, "Discord Among the Democrats," *Washington Post*, 21 August 1974; and Paul R. Wieck, "Kansas City Schism," *The New Republic*, 7 September 1974.

[115] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016.

[116] Muravchik, "The Democrats Divided."

[117] Broder, "Rift Ends Charter Session."

introduced by one of Strauss's eleventh-hour appointments to the Commission, a spouse of an AFL-CIO operative. Fraser asked rhetorically "why anyone would want to revive the discredited unit rule … unless they are so obsessed with turning back the clock they've lost sight of everything else."[118] But for others, such as commissioner Tom Carroll of Kentucky, the alternative to winner-take-all mechanism – namely, proportional representation – would provide "extreme candidates a voice they otherwise would not have," resulting in a replay of the 1972 disaster.[119]

Coming on the heels of the attempt to revise the affirmative action provisions, the introduction of the resolution in favor of restoring the unit rule so inflamed the tensions within August charter meeting that it pushed it passed the tipping point. Mississippi's Hodding Carter III attacked the CDM forces for "making what's left of this charter a sham."[120] While the unit rule resolution was subsequently withdrawn, many observers felt the CDM had overreached. As the UAW's Mildred Jeffrey incredulously observed, "these are party regulars who know that the art of politics is compromise. There was no willingness to engage in that art at the Kansas City meeting."[121] Together, Willie Brown and Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, vice chair of the Charter Commission, led the New Politics caucus out of the meeting, denying chairman Sanford a quorum. The meeting disbanded without a resolution on affirmative action in the charter, which would await debate and final resolution at the midterm conference in December.

---

[118] Broder, "Rift Ends Charter Session."
[119] Quoted in Elaine C. Kamarck, *Primary Politics: How Presidential Candidates Have Shaped the Modern Nominating System* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 92.
[120] Broder, "Rift Ends Charter Session."
[121] Mildred Jeffrey to Leonard Woodcock, 26 August 1974, Box 197, Folder 3: DNC Charter Commission 1974-74, Woodcock Collection.

Conclusion: Constitutionalizing Party Federalism

When Strauss gaveled to order the Democrats' first-ever midterm conference to ratify the party's first official constitution four months after the Kansas City blow-up, he told the thousands of party activists and officeholders that "Tonight we see a party of pragmatic change that has learned a lesson from 1968 and 1972, and that lesson, my friends, is that division leads to defeat. …[T]he reformer and the regular, each attempting to exclude the other from the decision-making process, in the end exclude the Democratic Party from victory." [122] While Strauss indulged in some self-congratulations on achieving this seemingly harmonious outcome, it was the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, of all the intraparty forces, that could take the most satisfaction from the document before them. In the interim since the August meeting, the CDM had been very active in recruiting delegates to run for the December conference, also meeting in Kansas City. The CDM had promoted its critique against the party reform through its newsletter, labor contacts, as well as its representatives on the Hill and within the DNC, framed not as a desire to return to the pre-1968 party structure, but as a return to the *coalition of the party's golden age* by codifying what Wattenberg called "the peculiarly limited roles and duties of an American-style national political party."[123] As another CDM missive read:

> On the eve of the charter convention we are gratified to report that our view has prevailed. …The proposal for a party based on individual membership enrollment, at the heart of the concept of a disciplined, homogenous party, has all but vanished, and is not likely to even reach the floor at Kansas City. The corollary proposal for mandatory midterm conferences to write party policy has been overwhelmingly rejected. …

---

[122] *The Official Proceedings of the 1974 Conference on Democratic Party Organization and Policy*, ed. Sheila Hixson (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1975).
[123] Quoted in Penn Kemble and Josh Muravchik, "Balancing the Democrats," *The New Leader*, 20 January 1975, Box 48, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Affirmative Action 1, O'Hara Collection.

Proposals for a number of novel and largely autonomous national party bodies, each adding its own layer of sweeping national authority over the affairs of state and local parties, have been rejected. In short, the proposals to be set before the charter convention now no longer embody the Europeanization of the Democratic Party, but rather the institutionalization of our party's uniquely American character.[124]

Having won the decisive battles before the December conference convened in Kansas City, the CDM felt assured of a moderate outcome for the party charter. By their own estimates, the balance of power among delegates attending the charter conference favored the charter as they had refashioned it.[125] They had been assisted by Strauss's efforts to boost attendance of party officeholders, who were invited as automatic delegates but not permitted to send alternates.[126] Over the protestations of reformers such as Donald Fraser, Strauss had also imposed strict rules limiting floor amendments and requiring the entire charter to be approved, item-by-item, in a single session, with no allowance for any motions to adjourn. However, in the sanguine atmosphere following the Democrats' sweep of the 1974 midterm elections, Strauss acted on the belief that Americans now expected legislative leadership from the party and added a day of "issues seminars" under the condition that no votes were taken.[127] He also enlisted the Democratic Advisory Council of Elected Officials to produce a brief party platform critical of President Gerald Ford's economic policy to be passed perfunctorily as part of the conference's opening ceremony.[128]

---

[124] CDM, "Resolution on Charter," Box 47, Folder: Democratic Party Charter Commission, Drafts and Background Material 2, O'Hara Collection.

[125] *CDM Notes*, October 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973 – November 1974, O'Hara Collection.

[126] DNC Memo from Robert Strauss to Democratic Members of the House, 14 October 1974, Box 149.G.8.5B, Folder: Party Reform, Fraser Papers.

[127] David S. Broder, "Democrats Pass Rules to Slow Controversy," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1974.

[128] McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 163.

The affirmative action provisions of the charter, which had been one of the sparks that ignited the August meeting explosion, were ultimately resolved on the conference floor after leaders of the progressive unions successfully pressured Democratic governors to intervene in favor of the "all party affairs" clause, so long as it included language specifically disallowing "mandatory" or "implied" quotas.[129] Some union delegates, especially those with the AFL-CIO, fought until the end, occasionally heckling Strauss from the conference floor and, in one case, announcing that "union labor will no longer suffer sophisticated denial and discrimination," despite a warning from Meany "to play a low profile" in Kansas City.[130] Indeed, Barkan's rabid attacks on the New Politics had delivered so little in the way of results, and done so much to place himself and Meany on the fringes of respectable opinion within the party, that in the run up to the midterm conference the labor leaders began to talk vaguely of "disengagement" from the "internal affairs" of the Democratic Party altogether. On the eve of the conference Barkan confessed to the AFL-CIO affiliated delegates, of which there were about 200, that he had "no recommendations" for how to vote on the specific charter provisions.[131]

In the aftermath of the midterm convention, members of the New Politics movement did their best to salvage what they could from the hollow victory many of them felt it to be. Letters of thanks and congratulations among some of the most prominent reformers inevitably acknowledged that the charter was not "all that we wanted" but held out hope that it would provide "a more durable base" on which to

---

[129] Austin Scott, "Compromise Averts Black Walkout," *Washington Post*, 8 December 1974; McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 160, 164, 170. For the full text of the Democratic Party Charter, see "Text of Party Charter Adopted at Democratic Conference Following Compromise," *New York Times*, 9 December 1974.

[130] *Official Proceedings of the 1974 Conference*; Handwritten Notes, 25-26 November 1974, Box 44, Folder: Democratic National Committee Meetings, 1974, AFL-CIO Records.

[131] Christopher Lydon, "Labor's Power Broker Frustrated by Democrats," *New York Times*, 6 December 1974.

build.[132] Those who were observers rather than participants were more blunt in their assessments: "The result in Kansas City is a piece of paper that, in effect, codifies the existing system – a loose coalition of state parties and interest groups … that unite when it suits their interests and divide when it doesn't."[133] When compared to the original Fraser-O'Hara proposal introduced to the 1972 convention, the final version of the charter stood as "testimony to the anti-party power in national politics – to the primacy of candidates over structure, to the centrifugal strength of state and local chairmen."[134] More pessimistic was the view that, if anything, the outcome of the charter struggle seemed to prove that "without a presidential nomination or an election at stake, grassroots organizing is next to impossible" in Democratic Party politics.[135]

The struggle for the charter did indeed shine a revealing spotlight on the shortcomings of the New Politics movement in the Democratic Party. The reforms that had provided an entryway for the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s had not provided a means of sustaining that mobilization, and as a consequence had failed to withstand the devastating defeat of McGovern in 1972. With the decisive intervention of the CDM, the New Politics had been put on the defensive, pouring all their efforts into retaining as much of the McGovern-Fraser reforms as possible in the face of a sophisticated attack centered on an alleged quota system. The combination of these limits and challenges had dealt the New Politics a decisive if not quite fatal defeat. The costs of that defeat, however, would not be fully appreciated until the latter half of the 1970s.

---

[132] See the series of letters contained in Box 149.G.8.4F, Folder: Charter, Fraser Papers.
[133] Robert S. Boyd, "Charter Nails Down Reforms But Is Short of Dems' Goals," *Detroit Free Press*, 9 December 1974, Box 15, Folder: Charter, clippings, n.d., Jeffrey Collection.
[134] Christopher Lydon, "The Democrats and Reform," *New York Times*, 1 December 1974.
[135] Lydon, "The Democrats and Reform."

CHAPTER 8

THE COSTS OF DEFEAT:
THE STRUGGLE FOR FULL EMPLOYMENT AND THE FAILURE OF THE
DEMOCRATIC AGENDA

By the beginning of 1975 the forward momentum of the New Politics movement in the Democratic Party had been decisively halted. After the landslide defeat of George McGovern in 1972, what energy remained from the initial burst of reform following the 1968 crisis had been commandeered by those in the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM) to institutionalize a decentralized party structure centered around elite brokerage between party officials, officeholders, and interest group leaders. While the New Politics had been responsible for initiating such novel party institutions as the Democratic Party charter and the 1974 midterm conference, the movement had been unable to control their proceedings, opening an opportunity for the anti-reform wing of the party to assume the mantle of reform and institute their own preferences.

The New Politics movement would never regain the initiative following this series of defeats. While a succession of new reform commissions would continue to operate with the license of national party authority through the rest of the 1970 and on into the 1980s, their proposals reinforced the redirection of reform the CDM had charted in the wake of the 1972 electoral disaster.

This chapter will describe the final episode of the reform movement as its activists struggled to press the Democrats in the direction of programmatic party politics, specifically concerning full employment policy as the decade's economic crisis continued to deepen. Contrary to the claims of its critics, who railed against the New Politics' purported turn away from unifying "bread and butter" economic issues of the New Deal

era in favor of divisive "social issues" such as affirmative action, the reform movement, which always had the support of very important sections of organized labor, spearheaded the campaign to revive one of the most ambitious and unfulfilled goals of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal agenda.[1] However, full employment policy failed to unify the Democrats in the 1970s due primarily to the weakness of the party's programmatic capacities and its internal mechanisms of accountability, which could have applied pressure on the Democratic administration of Jimmy Carter. As we will see, New Politics advocates tried in vain to use the 1976 party platform and the 1978 midterm conference as vehicles for advancing their full employment policy agenda. The previous defeats inflicted by the CDM had reduced the New Politics to little more than yet another interest group within the Democratic coalition, albeit with a tenuous hold on the party's institutional structure. However, as this chapter will show, it was not the CDM that delivered the final defeat to the New Politics; it was a sitting Democratic president. Despite Democratic majorities in Congress, President Carter resisted his own party's platform – a development that congressional Democrats and party activists were powerless to overcome. The confrontation between the party and the president over full employment policy exposed in full detail the costs of the defeat of the New Politics movement.

"The Party Is the Issue": Program, Platform, and Accountability

If the outcome of the struggle over the party charter and the 1974 midterm conference had indicated that the direction of reform had been subverted by the anti-reform wing of

---

[1] For the paradigmatic example of this anti-New Politics framework, see Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970).

the party, the subsequent creation of a new reform commission in the fall of 1975 by the

Democratic National Committee (DNC) chair, Robert Strauss, confirmed it. As the first

reform commission not to be sanctioned by the supreme authority of the national

convention, Strauss's top-down creation promised to and indeed eventually succeeded in

further retrenching the advances made between 1968 and 1972. The new body, called the

Commission on the Role and Future of Presidential Primaries (or the Winograd

Commission, chaired by Michigan state chair Morley Winograd) did ostensibly respond

to the growing concerns throughout the party over the proliferation of primaries in the

presidential nomination process, including among reformers Donald Fraser and United

Auto Workers (UAW) president Leonard Woodcock. [2] However, its composition

provided anti-reformers such as the CDM's Jeane Kirkpatrick, Evelyn Dubrow, Rochelle

Horowitz, Austin Ranney, and James O'Hara with an official forum through which to

continue to "nudge" the party away from the New Politics reforms.[3] And while its final

report, issued in 1978, said little to address the growing number of primaries in the

presidential nomination process, it did issue revised delegate selection guidelines for

1980, which reserved 10 percent of all state delegations for party and public officials,

partially overturning the McGovern-Fraser guidelines' ban on automatic delegates. As

---

[2] Interview with Donald Fraser and Arvonne Fraser, Minneapolis, 24 November 2014; Remer Tyson and Ralph Orr, "Woodcock Frets Over Democrats' Selection System," *Detroit Free Press*, 27 July 1975, Box 48, Folder: Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Affirmative Action 1, James O'Hara Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. Figures such as Fraser, who hailed from the especially robust caucus-convention Democratic Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, feared that primaries, while nominally more accessible forums, had detrimental effects on other party-building mechanisms that face-to-face caucuses preserved, such as formulating state-level party platforms, electing subnational party officials, and, more generally, the formation of shared political identity. For Woodcock and others in the UAW, fear that primaries were more easily accessible to racial populists such as George Wallace, who won the Michigan primary in 1972, left lingering doubts about a nomination system based mostly on primaries.
[3] William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 251. A list of Winograd Commission members, which did include token reformers, can be found in *The Official Proceedings of the 1976 Democratic National Convention* (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1976), 26-7.

Winograd commissioner Donald Fowler justified the revision, "these are people who are directly involved in the process of governing and whose support is needed by a Democratic President. Excluding them from the nomination process, as the present system does, by forcing them to run against their own constituents, can only make it more difficult for a Democratic President to govern."[4] The Commission also instituted a "sliding window" that gradually increased the threshold necessary for proportional delegate allocation from 15 to 20 to 25 percent throughout the shortened three-month primary season, foreclosing the viability of a challenger to the incumbent Democratic president, Jimmy Carter.[5]

It was in response to this conjuncture, and in recognition of the challenges facing the New Politics movement in the aftermath of the disappointing 1974 midterm conference, that Fraser suggested to fellow reformer James MacGregor Burns that "maybe for now some of us who believe these [midterm conferences] could be useful should sponsor one or more ourselves – an *unofficial* party conference."[6] They surmised that if many Democratic officials and public officeholders were skeptical about the utility of holding regular intraparty discussions of public policy, reformers could demonstrate that such conferences could have valuable party building effects by hosting their own outside the formal party framework. Calling themselves the Democratic Forum (and later, the Democratic Conference), Fraser and a coalition of New Politics groups, unions, and sympathetic officeholders sponsored the first National Democratic Issues Convention,

---

[4] Memo from Fowler et al. to DNC members, 3 April 1978, Box 6, Folder: Democratic National Conference 1978 [1], James Wall Subject Files, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
[5] See Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 250-2; William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), 74-87; David E. Price, *Bringing Back the Parties* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984), 152-5; and Ken Bode, "Restacking the Deck," *The New Republic*, 27 May 1978.
[6] Donald Fraser to James MacGregor Burns, 6 January 1975, Box 149.G.8.2F, Folder: Democratic Party Reform, Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, MN (emphasis in original).

held in Louisville, Kentucky, in November 1975. Convened as a "public examination of the direction of the Democratic Party," the gathering attracted seven of the ten expected presidential candidates for 1976, creating concern among some observers that while New Politics liberals had been given a serious setback in the official reform process, they continued to "tug to the left" from the outside.[7] And while the agenda included the major issues of public policy confronting the United States in the 1970s, such as structural problems in the economy and the nature of post-Vietnam foreign policy, its promotional material continued to underscore that "the party *is the issue*."[8]

The New Politics forces were not the only ones who saw a pressing need to revive parties as vehicles for citizen engagement. Senator Walter Mondale, in anticipation of his own run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1976, published a book addressing the crisis of confidence in America's public institutions in the wake of the Vietnam and Watergate crises. One of the future vice president's recommendations for restoring the accountability of those in power in Washington was a "strong and consistent party voice" in national affairs. Mondale bemoaned the absence of "institutional mechanisms" with which a party could register its dissatisfaction with or even restrain the presidential agenda. He wrote that "the responsiveness of our Presidents to their parties … cannot be reestablished unless the parties are themselves given new institutional life." This included midterm party policy conferences such as the one held in Kansas City in 1974, but with "more clout" over party officeholders.[9]

[7] David S. Broder, "The Democratic Party: The Missing Policy Debate," *Washington Post*, 29 October 1975.

[8] See the promotional material in Box 10, Folder 2: Democratic Review, National Issues Conference 1975, Steven Schlossberg Collection, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI (emphasis added).

[9] Walter F. Mondale, *The Accountability of Power: Toward a Responsible Presidency* (New York: David McKay, 1975), 229-55.

But while the organizers of the Democratic Issues Convention saw themselves as responding to the continuing crisis of public confidence in America's political institutions to develop effective solutions to its problems, they also recognized that the crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s extended beyond politics to the entire postwar political economy. As Figure 8.1 below shows, the downward trend in the unemployment rate seen through most of the 1960s began a sharp climb upward between 1970-71, before spiking to a postwar high of 9 percent in 1975. However, as much as the growth of unemployment created cause for concern for politicians and policymakers, it was the simultaneous appearance of increasing unemployment and rising price inflation, coined "stagflation," which overturned the core assumptions underpinning the postwar framework of Keynesian demand management. As Hubert Humphrey put it in an address to the Senate in 1975, "the old economic rules no longer apply."[10]

---

[10] Humphrey, quoted in Patrick Andelic, "Donkey Work: Redefining the Democratic Party in an 'Age of Conservatism,' 1972-1984," (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2015), 154. On the crisis of the postwar economic growth regime, see Collins, *More*; Stein, *Pivotal Decade*; Wolfe, *America's Impasse*; and Melvyn Dubofsky, "Jimmy Carter and the End of the Politics of Productivity," in Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham, *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1998).

Figure 8.1: Unemployment Rate, 1960-1980
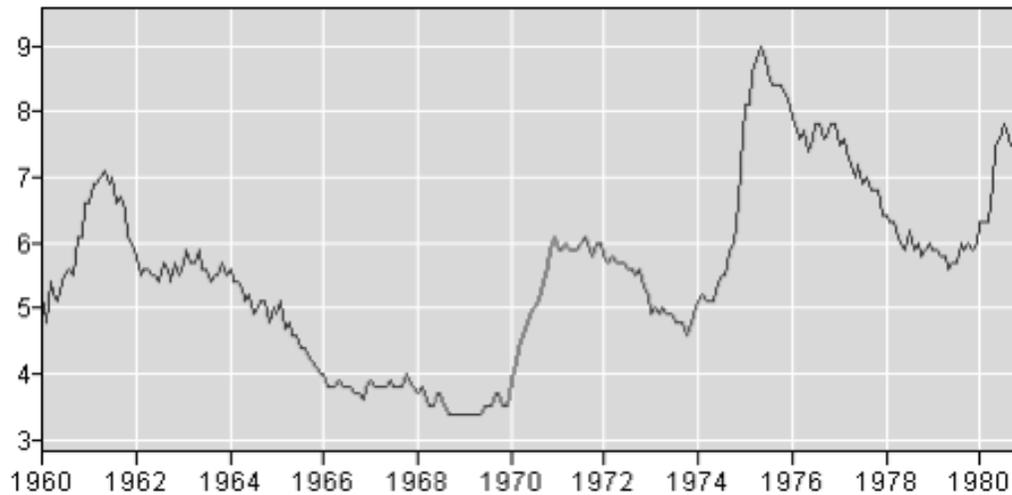
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Rather than requiring a mere technical fix, many agreed that the paradoxical nature of the crisis required new thinking. This was evident in the stated theme of the Issues Convention, whose statement of purpose read: "We come together not to hail past accomplishments or lament past mistakes – but rather to look at the future to raise some of the central questions that confront American society in the 1970s – *to go beyond the New Deal and the Cold War and toward policies appropriate to a great but not omnipotent power.*"[11] And while the convention's immediate purpose was to "offer new and relevant ideas" in the context of such a profound crisis, the vehicle through which these ideas was identified as "the party platform for 1976."[12]

---

[11] Democratic National Issues Convention, "Statement of Purpose," Box 10, Folder 2: Democratic Forum, National Issues Conference 1975, Schlossberg Collection (emphasis added).
[12] Democratic National Issues Convention Program, Box 10, Folder 2: Democratic Forum, National Issues Conference 1975, Schlossberg Collection.

From the New Deal to Social Democracy: The Return of Full Employment Planning

As many members of the New Politics movement planned for the Issues Convention in order to galvanize support for a project to shape the 1976 Democratic platform, others in the movement were already working in earnest to supply its content. Indeed, the need to go beyond the New Deal was made explicit by the UAW's Initiative Committee on Economic Planning (ICEP). Beginning in the fall of 1974, the ICEP was born from a series of high-level UAW meetings with prominent liberal economists, including M.E. Sharpe, publisher of the journal *Challenge*, John Kenneth Galbraith, Leon Keyserling, Wassily Leontief, and Robert Heilbroner. The group's self-defined purpose was to create "an instrument to channel, exploit and take advantage of [the] steady, ill-defined move to the left" they detected in the American populace. Public policy to plan for full employment, they surmised, could give shape and direction to the frenetic social activism of the 1970s during a temporary window of opportunity presented by the crisis. It was to be a left project, they asserted, but "written in centrist language."[13] The group sought to "make respectable the idea of planning in a democracy," and "establish the machinery by which effective democratic planning is made real."[14] They reached out to many other progressive union leaders for support in their effort to put full employment planning on the national agenda, especially those who had supported George McGovern in 1972, such as the Machinists, the Electrical Workers, the Communication Workers, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers.

---

[13] Steve Schlossberg to Leonard Woodcock, 16 October 1974, Box 200, Folder 5: "The Initiative Committee for Economic Planning, 1974," UAW President's Office: Leonard Woodcock Collection, Reuther Library.

[14] See the memos collected in Box 200, Folder: ICEP, 1975, Woodcock Collection.

The legislative vehicle they produced to channel left-liberal forces amidst the ongoing crisis was the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act. It was an ironic development in the rise and fall of the New Politics movement that its final chapter would feature Senator Hubert Humphrey, who had in 1948 done so much to promote party reform and in 1972 done so much to thwart it. Now, with structural reform largely sidelined as a pressing issue, and Humphrey's own presidential ambitions sidelined due to a diagnosis of bladder cancer, the Minnesota senator again returned to the forefront of the long-standing tendency to push the Democratic Party in a more programmatic direction.

Working with Humphrey and Representative Augustus Hawkins, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, the ICEP produced draft legislation that sought to revive the promise of an American social democracy lost three decades earlier. Humphrey-Hawkins was introduced into Congress in 1975 as an amendment to the 1946 Employment Act, which, before its dilution, had figured as the central pillar of the labor-liberal vision for a postwar social democratic America. That bill had aimed to institutionalize one of the central planks in the late President Franklin Roosevelt's "economic Bill of Rights," specifically "the right to a useful and remunerative job." In its original mandate, the federal government had to achieve full employment by means of national economic forecasting by the president's office, systems of congressional review, and compensatory spending mechanisms designed to offset any shortfalls in production levels in the private economy. The 1945 Full Employment bill, however, generated intense opposition from congressional conservatives – Republican and Democrat alike – and their patrons in the business community. Led by Republican senator Robert Taft,

congressional committees stripped the legislation of its enforcement mechanisms, eliminated the explicit commitment to full employment, and inserted an additional government mandate to ensure price stability. The resulting act of Congress was an almost meaningless federal commitment to "maximum" – not full – employment, and created two exclusively advisory bodies, the president's Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) and the congressional Joint Economic Committee.[15]

As we have seen, the centrality of an ambitious return to the Rooseveltian "right to a job" had been a feature of the New Politics movement since 1972, when the reformed national convention enshrined "guaranteed full employment" in the party platform for the first time since 1944. In contrast to the critics who insisted on an unbridgeable gulf separating economic "bread and butter" demands of the New Deal coalition from the "social issues" of the New Politics, advocates of full employment policy in the 1970s saw in it the potential to rebuild the labor-liberal coalition on a new basis by uniting a racially diverse working class of men and women around the demand to extend the rights revolution into economic policymaking. In the tradition of A. Philip Randolph and the 1963 March on Washington that stressed the dual demands for jobs and freedom, the bill sought to connect the issue of civil rights to employment. From Representative Hawkins's perspective, "it wouldn't make any sense to be able to eat in a public restaurant … if one didn't have the money."[16] For others, such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists' Cleveland Robinson, full employment was "the basic ingredient

---

[15] For the politics of the 1946 Employment Act, see Stephen K. Bailey, *Congress Makes a Law: The Story Behind the Employment Act of 1946* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950); and Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage, 1995), chapter 10.
[16] Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 270.

to successful affirmative action." [17] Indeed, other New Politics advocates saw full employment as "the precondition for practically every other progressive program." [18]

The details of the original Humphrey-Hawkins bill, drafted by the ICEP, specified that full employment meant an unemployment rate of 3 percent or less, a target to be achieved within 18 months of the legislation's passage. The president would be required to impose a system of wage and price controls and release an annual production and employment program to Congress's Joint Economic Committee for review, revision, and approval. Local planning councils would undertake public and private investment projects designed to respond to community needs, such as childcare, transportation, housing, education, and recreation. While not displacing the private sector as the primary engine of job creation, the bill did mandate an expanded role for the federal government in creating a Job Guarantee Office to fund local projects as well as a Standby Jobs Corps for the placement of temporary workers in public sector jobs when the private sector failed to absorb labor market surpluses. Generating considerable controversy in the national press and in Congress was Humphrey-Hawkins's provision for a legally enforceable right to work – that is, the right of chronically jobless citizens to sue the federal government for a job. [19]

If the supporters of Humphrey-Hawkins viewed the bill as a means to go beyond the New Deal, there was no such ambition to move beyond the social democratic

---

[17] Robinson, quoted in Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 268.

[18] DSOC newsletter, Box 58, Folder 8: Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee 1977, Victor Reuther Collection, Reuther Library.

[19] For details of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill, see Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 270-1; Gary Mucciaroni, *The Political Failure of Employment Policy, 1945-1982* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1990), 93-100; Margaret Weir, *Politics and Jobs: The Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 130-40; Harvey L. Schantz and Richard H. Schmidt, "The Evolution of Humphrey-Hawkins," *Journal of Policy Studies* 8 (1979); Helen Lachs Ginsburg, "Historical Amnesia: The Humphrey-Hawkins Act, Full Employment, and Employment as a Right," *Review of Black Political Economy* 39 (2012).

framework characteristic of many European polities often romanticized by American liberals. While the original legislation included a comprehensive system of wage and price controls necessary to contain inflation, wage restraint mechanisms, like those of the incomes policies in European corporatist bargaining structures, imposed disciplinary constraints on industrial militancy.[20] While they would eventually be stripped from the proposed legislation, it could well have been the case that Humphrey-Hawkins's wage and price controls offered a means of restraining price instability by requiring the unions to rein in the rank-and-file revolts characteristic of the decade. That it could have effectively done so, however, is unlikely given the crisis that plagued the politics of wage restraint in the social democracies across the Atlantic – a development to which the US promoters of full employment capitalism paid precious little attention.

As the Humphrey-Hawkins bill was being introduced into the House and Senate in the spring of 1975, the ICEP launched a national campaign "to promote public support for planning … and to lobby for passage" of the new legislation.[21] They gathered lists of potential congressional sponsors, disseminated articles through the print media and specialized journals, and provided testimony on the Hill before the Joint Economic Committee, chaired by Humphrey himself – all of which generated an impressive amount of media attention.[22] The ICEP was also joined in this effort by the Full Employment

---

[20] See Leo Panitch, *Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy: The Labour Party, the Trade Unions and Incomes Policy, 1945-1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Leo Panitch, *Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State* (London: Verso, 1986).

[21] Memo from M.E. Sharpe to ICEP, Box 201, Folder 1, Woodcock Collection.

[22] For just a sampling of the media coverage, see The Initiative Committee for National Economic Planning, "For a National Economic Planning System," *Challenge* 18 (1975); Hubert Humphrey, "Planning Economic Policy," *Challenge* 18 (1975); Derek Shearer and Lee Webb, "How to Plan in a Mixed Economy," *The Nation*, 11 October 1975; Augustus Hawkins, "Full Employment: The HR 50 Approach," *New York Times*, 10 October 1975; Ann Crittenden, "Pressure Seen for More Explicit Government Role in US Economic Affairs," *New York Times*, 11 November 1975; Paul McCracken, "The Targets for Economic

Action Council (FEAC), chaired by Murray Finley, president of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, and Coretta Scott King, president of the Martin Luther King Center for Social Change. Drawing its staff from a variety of civil rights and church organizations, as well as the bulk of its funding from the AFL-CIO, the FEAC complemented the ICEP's media blitz with sustained organizing efforts at the grassroots.[23]

Democracy '76

While the ICEP, the FEAC, and many progressive union staffers did much to promote the value of full employment planning in the national spotlight and through their grassroots networks, it was work of the newly formed Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) that coordinated the full employment coalition with Donald Fraser's party reform constituency to concentrate their efforts on getting a full employment plank inserted into the 1976 Democratic platform. Led by Michael Harrington, who had been an active proponent of continuing the 1968 antiwar insurgencies through the New Democratic Coalition (NDC) in the early 1970s, DSOC emerged in the wake of Harrington's own resignation from the anticommunist Socialist Party when its AFL-CIO-aligned majority voted in 1972 to oppose McGovern's presidential nomination. In contrast to many of his socialist comrades, some of whom became intimately involved in the anti-reform work of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Harrington challenged

---

Policy," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 November 1975, Robert Heilbroner, "The American Plan," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 Jane 1976.

[23] See the FEAC materials collected in Box 23, ADA Records, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI; as well as the AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting Minutes for 16-23 February 1976 and 19 May 1976, Box 40, Minutes of the AFL-CIO Executive Council Meeting, AFL-CIO Records, George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, MD.

the existence of irreconcilable divisions within the Democratic coalition. Contrary to the CDM's claims that the New Politics movement was antagonistic to working class interests, Harrington saw the possibility of renewing labor-liberalism as a dynamic force for working class advocacy, broadly defined. He framed his project as "seeking to unify the Meany wing of the labor movement [with] the trade unionists who worked so hard for McGovern, and the best elements in the 'New Politics' camp."[24]

Harrington had attended the 1974 midterm conference in Kansas City as a delegate, but had left with a sense of "helplessness."[25] As he later reflected, "the Democratic leadership had carefully structured the convention so that there was really nothing for anyone to do."[26] To avoid such a scenario in the future, Harrington sought to take the initiative from the party leadership by seizing on the platform as an arena of activist influence in the party. At the end of 1975, Harrington and other members of DSOC launched what they called the Democracy '76 project, aiming to "have a programmatic impact on the Democratic Party and on public opinion generally."[27] Through its network of about 3,000 activists, DSOC orchestrated a campaign to insert the demand for full employment planning into the Democratic platform, irrespective of who the eventual nominee was. This included running its own members for delegates,

---

[24] Michael Harrington, "The Last Convention of the Socialist Party of the United States," Box 58, Folder 7, Victor Reuther Collection. See also, Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 298-302; and Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 74-9.
[25] Quoted in Isserman, *The Other American*, 328.
[26] Michael Harrington, *The Long Distance Runner: An Autobiography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1988), 96.
[27] Marjorie Gellerman and Jack Clark, Democracy '76 Worksheet No. 1, 1 February 1976, Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) Papers, Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, NY.

lobbying delegates once named to the Platform Committee, as well as providing testimony before the Platform Committee's regional hearings.[28]

Between the efforts of DSOC and the FEAC within their respective grassroots networks and the influence of the ICEP in the national media and within the halls of Congress, by the election year of 1976 full employment had become what economist Milton Friedman begrudgingly called the new "litmus test" for candidates in the Democratic presidential contest.[29] Even Carter, the most reluctant of the Democratic candidates to endorse Humphrey-Hawkins, was compelled to identify unemployment as "the greatest problem facing the American people today" and affirmed that "every person has a right to a decent job." As his aide Stuart Eizenstat wrote to him at the time, "I do not see that such a position in any way would jeopardize your standing with others in your constituency, while opposition to the [full employment] bill per se would be critically costly."[30] However, within the platform hearings, the wording of Carter's economic policy planks indicated the limits to how aggressively he would pursue full employment, packaging both the "achievement of full employment" and the achievement of "price stability" as coequal parts of a new Democratic administration's "first priorities." While he insisted that economic policy be expansionary "in the near future,"

---

[28] See Michael Harrington and Marjorie Gellermann to Signers of the Democracy '76 Statement of Purpose, 4 June 1976, Box 58, Folder 7: Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee 1976, Reuther Papers.

[29] Friedman, quoted in Timothy Stanley, "Going Beyond the New Deal: Socialists and the Democratic Party in the 1970s," in Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley, eds, *Making Sense of American Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 68.

[30] Memo from Stuart Eizenstat to Governor Carter, n.d., Box 20, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins Bill, 9/76, Stuart Eizenstat Papers, Carter Library.

he also believed that a balanced budget could be achieved "within the context of full employment" by 1979.[31]

In contrast to Carter's ambivalence about a full-throated commitment to achieving full employment, other prominent actors in the party leadership jumped aboard. Speaking for the House Democratic leadership, Tip O'Neill testified before the Platform Committee on the need to achieve a "3 percent unemployment [rate] … by the end of 1981," and said that the Humphrey-Hawkins bill should be "the centerpiece" of the 1976 platform. [32] The AFL-CIO also endorsed full employment policy, specifying that Humphrey-Hawkins had "the full support" of the labor federation.[33] However, it was UAW president Leonard Woodcock who explicitly connected the demand for full employment with the concern of the New Politics movement to create a meaningful role for the platform in a programmatic "party of principle [that is] ready to account for its performance." While the platform must "include promises and programs," it "should [also] define its own relationship to the party," namely that "the national platform is supreme and pre-emptive with respect to general principles and broad national issues." He continued:

> State and local platforms should be expected to conform … to the national platform. State and local independence and divergence would remain permissible, but there would be *coherence* on philosophical imperatives. … We would not bind our victorious candidates on the details of any legislation or specific program, but we would insist upon allegiance to

---

[31] Jimmy Carter, "A New Beginning: Presentation to the Platform Committee of the Democratic Party," Section A: The Economy, 16 June 1976, Box 20, Folder 35, Mildred Jeffrey Collection, Reuther Library.

[32] Majority Leader Thomas O'Neill, Submission of the House Democratic Leadership to the Platform Committee, 18 May 1976, Box 1, Folder 3: Democratic Party Platform, 1976, Schlossberg Collection.

[33] AFL-CIO Platform Proposals, Box 1, Folder 4: Democratic Party Platform, 1976, Schlossberg Collection.

great principles and deeply held party commitments for all who run under the Democratic banner.[34]

While officially only the representative of the UAW, Woodcock articulated a perspective that many other labor leaders sympathetic with the New Politics shared. In fact, nine of the unions that had come to the assistance of McGovern's campaign in 1972 coordinated their political activity to elect convention delegates to the 1976 Democratic convention. Calling themselves the Labor Coalition Clearinghouse, they dedicated themselves to not only "achieving a 1976 Democratic Party Platform and presidential nominee acceptable to the nation's working men and women," but also making sure that "the Party's nominee … is *committed* to that platform."[35]

While the issue of party accountability did not make it into the party platform as Woodcock had desired, the title of the platform, *Contract with the People*, did implicitly accept the arguments being advanced by the New Politics as well as others, such as vice-presidential nominee Walter Mondale, who viewed parties as a vital linkage between citizens and the state. The issue of accountability, however, would return as the administration's action on full employment policy appeared to many to be a breach with the party principles established in 1976. As we will see, this conflict unfolded within the party's second midterm party conference, held in Memphis in 1978, which, while not mandated by the party charter, was passed by the 1976 convention itself "for the purpose of addressing issues embraced in the 1976 Democratic Party Platform and other national

---

[34] Statement of Leonard Woodcock to the Democratic Platform Committee, 18 May 1976, Box 2, Folder 24: Democratic Platform Speech, Leonard Woodcock, 1976, Schlossberg Collection (emphasis added).
[35] Labor Coalition Clearinghouse, *Delegate Update*, May 1976, Box 12B, Folder 13, DSA Records (emphasis added).

issues and the for the purpose of discussing the state of the Democratic Party and its future."[36]

In the end, the New Politics movement's Democracy '76 campaign to promote the idea of full employment in public opinion and get it written into the 1976 Democratic platform was remarkably successful. The platform drafting process was itself overseen by New Politics veteran Joseph Duffey, serving as a member of Carter's team. Even though the platform failed to mention the pending Humphrey-Hawkins legislation by name, nor did it call for mandatory wage and price controls, it did place "full employment" as the first plank in the document (followed by "price stability") and "pledged" the administration to achieve 3 percent unemployment within four years (not in 18 months as the original legislation had demanded).[37] Harrington walked away from the national convention feeling that the platform "was probably the most liberal in the history of the Democratic Party."[38]

President Carter versus Humphrey-Hawkins

Whatever semblance of consensus on the pressing need for bold full employment legislation appeared to be at hand in the presidential campaign and at the Democratic convention's platform hearings evaporated soon after the inauguration of the new Democratic administration. As we will see, this was mostly a product of the opposition to any such measures from within the Carter White House itself. However, in contrast to those who have explained the policy shift of the Carter administration in terms of the

---

[36] Democratic Conference Memo from Donald Fraser to Interest Democrats, "1978 Democratic Mid-Term Conference," 25 January 1978, Box 149.C.12.2F, Folder: Democratic Conference, Fraser Papers.
[37] Democratic Party Platform of 1976, 12 July 1976, available at www.presidency.ucsb.edu.
[38] Harrington, *Long Distance Runner*, 104.

president's own ideological inclination, whatever fiscally conservative tendencies Carter may have personally harbored must be contextualized within the political economy of the late 1970s. This is important in not only explaining the opposition of the White House to the original thrust of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill but also the weakness of the full employment coalition.

Ironically, one important source of the administration's hostility to the Humphrey-Hawkins bill developed when the principal sponsors in Congress sought to get George Meany and the AFL-CIO to support the bill. Meany, while eventually giving the bill his blessing, initially objected to its proposed mechanism of wage and price controls, necessary to restrain the inflationary pressures that the tight labor markets of a full employment economy were likely to produce. From Meany's perspective, wage and price controls could easily function as a Trojan horse for state interference with labor's jealously guarded prerogative of collective bargaining. Also, as the inflationary years during WWII, the Korean War, and the recent Nixon administration had taught the veteran labor leader, it is far easier (and politically expedient) for federal regulators to restrain wages rather than prices, shifting the burden of wage-and-price control measures onto labor rather than business.[39]

Secondly, an increasingly paranoid and aggrieved business community mobilized around opposition to mandatory price controls, launching the Business Roundtable to join the newly revived and politicized US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers in their collective effort to resist the expansion of the

---

[39] Benjamin C. Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 121.

regulatory state.[40] Facing staunch opposition to such invasive regulations from both the business community and the labor leadership, Hawkins and Humphrey agreed to remove wage and price controls from the bill. Instead, it committed the federal government to achieving full employment, still defined as a 3 percent unemployment rate, but specified that such a goal could not be sacrificed in favor of restraining inflation.

Finally, with the provision for wage and price controls removed, Humphrey-Hawkins came under attack from policy-minded liberals and conservatives alike, fearing that tightened labor markets would promote inflation, thus exacerbating the crisis it was meant to resolve. Vocal criticisms from stalwarts in the previous Republican administration or conservative public intellectuals like Milton Freedman and Friedrich Hayek were to be expected. More devastating, however, was the defection of liberals from whom the sponsors had expected support. Brookings Institution economist and Carter's chair of the Council of Economic Advisors Charles Schultze, for instance, testified before Congress that the bill's "prevailing wage" clause threatened to drain workers out of low-paying private sector jobs into higher paying public sector positions, increasing the strain on federal budgets and pushing unemployment below its "natural" rate.[41]

Another blow to the bill's prospects came in the form of shifting concerns in public opinion, which began prioritizing inflation as a greater concern than rising unemployment.[42] This had its own ramifications inside Congress, as the new crop of liberal Democrats, hailing from increasingly suburbanized middle-class districts,

---

[40] See Waterhouse, *Lobbying America*, chapter 4; Mucciaroni, *The Political Failure of Employment Policy*, 217-20.
[41] See Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 277.
[42] Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 278.

registered their constituencies' frustration with the pinch inflation put on consumption. With little inherent loyalty to either business or labor, many middle-class consumers were swayed by business propaganda claiming that inflation stemmed *exclusively* from excessive government spending and the shortsightedness of labor unions bidding up their wages.[43]

Inside the White House, with the exception of Vice President Mondale and Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall, very few top members of the Carter administration had much interest in promoting full employment, and some, such as Schultze, explicitly sought to prioritize the fight against inflation instead.[44] With reference to the pending Humphrey-Hawkins legislation, the White House was eager to avoid committing to numerical targets and specific timetables, such as achieving 3 percent unemployment within four years (let alone 18 months), and preferred to retain "flexibility" in circumstances where the twin goals of price stability and full employment were deemed to be in conflict. Michael Blumenthal, chair of Carter's Economic Policy Group, viewed the proposed planning mechanisms as "extensive and costly," and reported that in the eyes of the business community "these provisions seem to threaten a significant enlargement of governmental interference in the private economy."[45] Additionally, Carter's team voiced objections to the bill's concept of a guaranteed right to a job, which they saw as "not … practically feasible" and having "enormous potential effects on the budget and inflation."[46] They insisted on either watering it down or including a "carefully

---

[43] Waterhouse, *Lobbying America*, 111, 123.
[44] W. Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 83-5.
[45] White House memo to President Jimmy Carter from W. Michael Blumenthal, 6 June 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6345] [1], Eizenstat Subject Files.
[46] Memo from Lyle Gramley to Charles Schultze, 12 July 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6345] [2], Eizenstat Subject Files.

worded statement … indicating that establishing a right to work does not mean a legally binding commitment for the Federal government to provide a job."[47] Taken together, they acknowledged, "These disagreements go right to the heart of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill."[48]

This put the Democratic administration and its congressional supporters in increasingly tense opposition to the party's labor-liberal wing. Such a tight spot was not lost on Carter's top policy advisors. As one internal White House memo warned:

> This is a very sensitive issue, much broader than the legislation. It involves the leadership of major organizations throughout the country who suddenly feel cut off from this administration, an administration which they feel shows little concern about domestic issues. We are treading on very unstable grounds politically and socially. I'm getting nervous because we're going to be blasted soon, due to our inactivity in this area.[49]

Carter's domestic policy advisor, Stuart Eizenstat, worried aloud to his deputy that "we are sitting on a time bomb here which will explode unless we move quickly."[50]

Rather than risk an all out confrontation with their liberal supporters, the White House took an evasive approach to the problem, never expressing outright opposition to Humphrey-Hawkins but seeking to transform the legislation into a symbolically

---

[47] White House memo from Lyle E. Gramley and William Spring to W. Michael Blumenthal, et al., 23 September 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6342] [1], Eizenstat Subject Files. To hedge their bets on the issue of the right to a job, the White House senior staff ran the proposed language by the Office of Legal Counsel, who reassured them that "reasonable judicial interpretation would find no actionable entitlement." It went on to warn that "it is likely, however, that the question would at least be litigated and therefore we recommend alternative language might be used." Memo from Deputy Assistant Attorney General to Margaret McKenna, Deputy Counsel to the President, 26 October 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill], [O/A 6345] [4], Eizenstat Subject Files.
[48] White House memo to President Jimmy Carter from Stuart Eizenstat, 24 May 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6345] [2], Eizenstat Subject Files.
[49] White House memo from Valerie Pinson to Charles Schultze, 30 June 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6345] [2], Eizenstat Subject Files.
[50] White House memo from Stuart Eizenstat to Bert Carp, 11 April 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6345] [2], Eizenstat Subject Files.

meaningful but economically innocuous law.[51] To effect this, the White House composed a substitute bill, which, they planned, would "include enough of Humphrey-Hawkins' language so that both sponsors might be able to adopt it, without our having to take a position on the current bill."[52] They coordinated their strategy with the Democratic Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill, who suggested the administration give ground on the low unemployment target and then "just not worry about it."[53] The president and his advisors, however, were not content to ignore the potential backlash that could come from the liberal wing of the party if they were perceived to simply be "not worried about it." As a White House memo warned the president: "We believe it is important for the administration to do everything we can to secure consideration and passage of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill. *If we are not seen as doing everything we can, criticism from the Black Caucus and others may escalate, and, we are afraid, spill over into the midterm convention.*"[54]

Trying to Hold the President Accountable: The Democratic Agenda

The senior staff of the Carter White House was not off base in fearing that the president's failure to support aggressive action on full employment would be a potentially costly liability in the upcoming 1978 midterm party conference in Memphis. As members of DSOC watched negotiations over Humphrey-Hawkins stretch into 1977, the organization issued a call to the Democracy '76 network "to reconstitute itself so that it could build a

---

[51] Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 281-2.
[52] Eizenstat to Carp, 11 April 1977, Eizenstat Subject Files.
[53] CEA memo from Charles Schultze to Stuart Eizenstat, 7 September 1977, Box 221, Folder: Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [O/A 6342] [1], Eizenstat Subject Files, Jimmy Carter Library.
[54] White House Memo from Senior Staff to President Jimmy Carter, "Additional Material for 1 PM Meeting with Senator Baker," n.d., Box 22, Folder: [Employment] – Humphrey-Hawkins [Bill] [4], Office of Domestic Policy Staff, Carter Library (emphasis added).

movement that would call upon President Carter to live up to the Democratic Party Platform."[55] The reactivated network, calling itself the Democratic Agenda, coordinated its actions among the various groups that had initially pressed for the inclusion of the full employment plank in the party platform at the 1976 convention: Fraser's Democratic Conference; the Full Employment Action Council; Americans for Democratic Action; and the leaderships of the progressive labor unions such as the UAW, the Machinists, the Communication Workers, AFSCME, and many others. The Democratic Agenda also made an alliance with the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), which, since the 1974 formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), had become increasingly engaged in explicitly working class feminist advocacy, evidenced by the UAW's own Mildred Jeffrey taking on the direction of the NWPC's Democratic Task Force.[56] As she put it during her testimony at the 1976 Democratic convention: "We're not here to ask for invitations for tea at the White House. We're here to be heard about people's needs – job guarantees, decent housing, national healthcare, education – all free of discrimination."[57]

The Democratic Agenda focused its efforts on the opportunity to have what they called an "accountability session" with the administration at the upcoming midterm party conference, scheduled for December 1978.[58] The coalition, however, defined its intention

---

[55] DSOC executive secretary Carl Shier to William Winpisinger, 20 February 1977, Box 58, Folder 8: Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, 1977, Reuther Collection.
[56] See the Democratic Women's Task Force strategy memos concerning the Memphis midterm conference in Box 285, Folder 9, NWPC Records, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. See also, Letter from Lael Stegall to Patsy Fryman (CWA) thanking her for funding the Task Force's activity at the Memphis conference, Box 285, Folder 10, NWPC Records.
[57] Jeffrey, quoted in National Women's Political Caucus, *Women's Political Times*, July 1976, Box 12B, Folder 1, DSA Records.
[58] Democratic Agenda Press Release, "Full Employment Activists Foresee Mass Demonstrations, 'Accountability Sessions' for President Carter, Congress," 13 November 1977, Box 12A, Folder 11, DSA Records.

as more than "to just decry the inadequacies of the Carter program," but to "present alternatives" that the administration could be made to accept.[59] To build momentum and public support for their project, the Democratic Agenda sponsored a week of education and mobilization activities under the banner of Full Employment Week in the fall of 1977, culminating in a Full Employment conference in Washington and a "mass lobby for jobs" outside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee.[60] As Harrington put it:

> All of us voted for Jimmy Carter and some of us were involved in the platform process. It says right on the cover of that platform that it's a contract with the people. … Well, we are here to collect on that contract.[61]

By the middle of 1978, the upcoming midterm party conference threatened to become a showdown. Many members of the press framed the intraparty dispute as a personal political rivalry for the 1980 Democratic nomination between President Carter and Massachusetts senator Edward Kennedy, then receiving prods from liberals to run.[62] But as White House press secretary Jody Powell told the *Boston Globe*, "the dispute which appears to be on the horizon in Memphis is not between the President and Senator Kennedy … but between the Administration and the Democratic Agenda."[63] In an effort to foreclose the public relations disaster that could be viewed as the party's return to the

---

[59] Democratic Agenda, "Description of Washington Conference Intentions and Goals," Box 12A, Folder 2, DSA Records.

[60] See the Democratic Agenda Strategy Memos and Promotional Materials in Box 12A, Folder 2, DSA Records. See also, A. H. Raskin, "Nationwide Rallies for 'Decent' Jobs at 'Decent' Wages," *New York Times*, 31 August 1977.

[61] Harrington, quoted in William Clayborne, "Democratic Groups Catch President in a Crossfire," *Washington Post*, 12 November 1977.

[62] See Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2010).

[63] Powell, quoted in Isserman, *The Other American*, 334.

chaos of 1968 and 1972, Carter signed the Humphrey-Hawkins Act into law in October 1978, after extracting further concessions from its principals. While the bill's final form established for the first time a formal procedure for coordinating government action to achieve full employment, it did not guarantee anyone a right to a job, nor did it even initiate any actual job-creating programs. It was, in the words of Margaret Weir, "a shell of the original bill, neither enhancing planning capabilities nor guaranteeing full employment."[64] With the main provisions stripped from the Act or compromised by an equal commitment to reducing inflation, the Carter administration had effectively neutralized the full employment legislative agenda of his own party. Under such circumstances, Hawkins later reflected, "the only thing you can do is [try] to hold the president accountable."[65] Accordingly, Hawkins sent a letter to all midterm conference delegates urging them to "take a firm stand" and push the party leadership to "reaffirm" the Democrats' commitment to full employment.[66]

Even with the Humphrey-Hawkins legislation no longer pending in Congress, the prospect of meeting his critics and being held to account publicly at the midterm conference was an enormous source of concern for Carter and his administration. Looking at it as the president's "first speech as Party leader," Carter's speechwriters emphasized,

> This is one of the most important political speeches of your presidency. To the press you are Daniel going into the lion's den to confront the left wing

---

[64] Weir, *Politics and Jobs*, p. 131.

[65] Augustus F. Hawkins, Oral History Interview, Conducted 1988 by Carlos Vásquez, UCLA Oral History Program, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program, available at http://www.oac.cdlib.org.

[66] Letter from August Hawkins to Conference Delegates, 28 November 1978, Box 12, Folder: [Wall, James – Miscellaneous – Democratic National Committee and Party Conference, 1978], James Wall Subject Files, Carter Library.

of the party. How you emerge will greatly influence next year's coverage
of Democratic Party politics.[67]

As numerous White House memos reveal, any opportunity for party activists to
meaningfully participate in debate and discussion with the president or cabinet members
was constrained or eliminated. Carter's control of the Democratic National Committee,
which was charged with planning the party conference, enabled his team to rest assured
that they could "control all proceedings … screen all proposals … and screen any
resolutions proposed for a vote."[68] Of the 150 resolutions proposed by the Democratic
Agenda and other organized groups to the DNC Arrangements Committee, only twenty-
four were approved to be debate and voted on in Memphis, and their discussion was
scheduled for the final hours of the final day of the conference. As DNC chair John
White explained, "Of course we have a broad range of opinions on some issues within
our party. But if we get foolish, if we go beyond proper political division and look
quarrelsome, there are things that could hurt the Democratic Party and the Democratic
president."[69] Further, to ensure that the proceedings went smoothly in Memphis, the
White House created a "pro-Administration whip system" to control votes on the floor
should a delegate revolt arise. However, the administration's "public posture," one

---

[67] White House Memo from Jeffry Rafshoon, et al., to the President, 22 November 1978, Box 38, Folder: 12/8/78 – Remarks – Democratic Mid-Term Conference, Memphis, TN [1], Staff Offices Speechwriter's Chronological File; White House Memo from Jeffry Rafshoon, et al., to the President, 3 December 1978, Box 38, Folder: 12/8/78 – Remarks – Democratic Mid-Term Conference, Memphis, TN [2], Staff Offices Speechwriter's Chronological File, Carter Library.
[68] White House memo from Tim Kraft to undisclosed recipients, 7 September 1978, Box 238, Folder: Democratic National Committee [6], Rick Hutcheson Subject Files, Carter Library.
[69] John C. White, quoted in T.R. Reid, "Democrats Seeking to Curb Floor Fights," *Washington Post*, 1 December 1978.

planning memo stressed, should be to insist that "this is going to be an open Conference."[70]

While the enactment of the compromised Humphrey-Hawkins bill robbed the Democratic Agenda of the main impetus behind their mobilization for an accountability session with the president, the Carter administration's new federal budget, calling for less spending on social welfare provisions and more for defense, provided the liberal activists attending the midterm party conference with a new focal point on which to concentrate their frustrations. Ahead of the December gathering in Memphis, the UAW's newly elected president Douglas Fraser (no relation to Donald Fraser) put out a call to the groups and organizations associated with the Democratic Agenda for a strategy meeting in Detroit in October. "It is legitimate to ask," he wrote in his callout, "why, with the Democrats in control of more than two-thirds of the Congress and in the Executive Branch, has so little progress been made toward adoption of the Democratic platform the party worked so hard to develop?" While Fraser admitted that their policy agenda "cannot succeed unless we also … reform the American political system," he argued that their Memphis strategy amounted to "mak[ing] the Democratic Party in fact what in principle it has proclaimed itself to be since the New Deal – a genuinely progressive people's party."[71]

However, as the showdown in Memphis approached, cracks in the edifice of the reform coalition began to show. While most unionists were strongly dissatisfied with the administration and its turn to fiscal austerity rather than full employment, the coalition began to splinter under the strain of confronting the president – an act of defiance that

---

[70] White House memo from Rick Hutcheson to Hamilton Jordan and Tim Kraft, 11 September 1978, Box 241, Folder: Midterm Conference, 1978 [4], Hutcheson Subject Files.
[71] Letter from Douglas Fraser to Marjorie Phyfe, Box 12A, Folder 24, DSA Records.

could jeopardize their access to the highest and most powerful political office. Carter's operatives at the DNC sought to exploit this dependence to exacerbate divisions within the New Politics coalition. This was well illustrated in one DNC memo, which reported that the Communications Workers (CWA), who had been one of the most active unions in McGovern's campaign and had generally supported the creation of a stronger, accountable Democratic Party, "are not interested in taking on the W[hite] H[ouse], especially since the Telecommunications Act, the one piece of legislation they care deeply about, is coming up in the next Congress."[72] Loath to risk the well-being of their dues-paying membership by burning their bridges with the Democratic leadership, despite their extreme dissatisfaction with the nature of that leadership, the CWA, like most progressive unions allied with the Democrats, found themselves facing a strategic conundrum and withdrew from the UAW-organized strategy meeting ahead of the Memphis conference.

Nor was the onset of the CWA's case of cold feet exceptional. Many leaders of progressive unions expressed hesitation about confronting the president in the months before the midterm conference. If they did challenge the president, they worried, they may not have the necessary numbers to win in a floor fight. And, if they did not have the sufficient numbers, "an outright political defeat at the Conference might then seriously threaten any hopes that we still have for the passage of other items on the liberal agenda." Many unions were thus not inclined to "push strongly for voting at the Conference," nor

---

[72] DNC Memo from Elaine Kamarck, 6 October 1978, Box 241, Folder: Midterm Conference 1978 [5], Hutcheson Subject Files.

were they willing "to be individually identified" with specific positions for fear of White House reprisals.[73]

As the labor wing of the New Politics movement fractured in the face of confronting the president, others within the Democratic Party moved to limit the extent of the damage such a confrontation could entail for the president and, they feared, the party as a whole. Despite the growing personal animosity between George Meany and President Carter over the president's failure to support labor law reform, the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education vowed that it would "protect" the president from any "sharp criticism" at the Memphis conference.[74] Detroit mayor Coleman Young, chair of the DNC's Memphis Arrangements Committee, scolded the Democratic Agenda and others seeking to hold Carter to account.

> We have a platform. That's enough. We don't need a [midterm] convention. We must be sure that nothing we come up with repudiates the President. Are we here to give the President a mark?[75]

While the activists of the New Politics were aware of the difficult odds they faced going into the conference, those odds worsened further as an eleventh-hour rules change engineered by DNC chairman White to restrict floor resolutions redefined the operative meaning of "majority" from half of those present and voting to half of all 1,633 delegates. As an increasingly large number of Democratic officeholders decided to shun the midterm meeting and bad winter storms prevented many from the Midwest and West

---

[73] Bob Carolla to Donald Fraser, "August 2nd Democratic Conference Meeting," 3 August 1978, Box 149.C.12.2F, Folder: Democratic Conference, Fraser Papers.
[74] Victor Reisel, "Inside Labor," 28 June 1978, Box 12A, Folder 17, DSA Records.
[75] Coleman Young, quoted in Letter from Marjorie Phyfe to Michael Harrington, "Memphis," 4 August 1978, Box 12A, Folder 17, DSA Records.

from attending, White's last-minute maneuver effectively prevented any serious challenge from emerging on the floor, which required a petition of 200 signatures to even be added to the agenda.[76]

However, despite the odds, the Democratic Agenda did manage to get one resolution critical of Carter's austerity budget on the floor for debate and a vote. Their budget resolution attacked Carter's proposed spending cuts and charged that the resulting increase in unemployment would be "in direct violation of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act."[77] While the Democratic Agenda won about 40 percent support for their budget resolution, it failed to gain the support of the majority. White House deputy press secretary Rex Granum spun the failed resolution as evidence of "strong support" for Carter's austerity agenda, and reported that the president left Memphis "with an even firmer determination to lend his strength to the fight against inflation."[78]

Conclusion: The Limits of the New Politics

In the end, the New Politics' final attempt to press the Democratic Party toward a programmatic, accountable party organization through the activity of the Democratic Agenda at the Memphis midterm conference amounted to little. Their attempt to make meaningful the party principles and policy alternatives enshrined in the platform ran up against the limits of the New Politics movement. The previous struggle over the party charter had resulted in formally institutionalizing the power of officeholders and officials

---

[76] David S. Broder and Bill Peterson, "Key Democrats to Shun Midterm Parley," *Washington Post*, 4 December 1978; David S. Broder and Edward Walsh, "New Rules for Democrats," *Washington Post*, 8 December 1978.

[77] A copy of this resolution is available in Box 224, Folder: Midterm Conference [1], Chief of Staff Betty Rainwater's Subject Files, Carter Library.

[78] Edward Walsh and Warren Brown, "Austerity Prevails Despite Murmurs, White House Says," *Washington Post*, 12 December 1978.

over its rank and file activists. Thus, when it came time to put the midterm party conference to its intended use – to assess the party leadership's record in office – the mechanisms of accountability proved too weak in the face of White House hostility. Without a sympathetic president in the Oval Office or a pragmatic reformer at the helm of the DNC, New Politics activists lost control over the planning, scheduling, and rule making that determined whether the midterm conference became an opportunity to build a party of a different type or simply a media event to showcase the president's achievements and promote his reelection. Indeed, it is a measure of just how limited an impact the New Politics actually had on transforming the party structure that when the Democrats regained the White House for the first time since the 1968 crisis, the party became totally subordinated to the interests of the incumbent leader.

The disappointing results in Memphis for the advocates of the New Politics should have come as no great surprise. Some, such as Robert Strauss's former assistant Mark Siegel, who had left the Carter administration on bad terms, attacked the Democratic administration for betraying the New Politics wing of the party: "a product of the reform dream," he wrote in the *Washington Star*, "has been inverted by the Carter White House."[79] But such a shortsighted view ignores the redirection of reform that was already well underway before anyone had ever heard of Jimmy Carter (an "inversion" that Siegel himself played no small part in as Strauss's staff director on the Charter Commission). Indeed, the decisive battles that shaped the possibilities for meaningful participation and intraparty accountability in Memphis had already been fought and decided in the Charter Commission in 1974 and in the election season of 1972. In

---

[79] Mark Siegel, "Carter's Memphis 'Win' Can Misfire," *Washington Star*, n.d., Box 224, Folder: Midterm Conference [1], Rainwater Subject Files.

recognition of this, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, whose spokespersons were hardline critics of Carter's foreign policy, felt no compunction to recruit or influence the delegates at the 1978 midterm conference, confessing "we haven't made any special effort to get delegates to this one"[80]

The late 1970s thus confirmed what was already evident by mid-decade: that rather than the reform movement transforming the Democratic Party, the Democratic Party had transformed the reform movement. Beginning with the second generation of reform commissions launched after McGovern's defeat, the content and meaning of "reform" was converted into a vehicle to undo the most far-reaching affirmative action guidelines within the delegate selection process and completely subvert the intention of the party charter. While the Winograd Commission and its successors continued to push back against the participatory reforms of the 1969-72 period, the struggle over full employment displayed the extent to which the New Politics had already been defeated.

---

[80] Wattenberg, quoted in Andrew Mollison, "Most Democrats Don't Want Fight At Memphis Meeting," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 24 September 1978, in Box 12A, Folder 2, DSA Records.

<div align="center">**CONCLUSION**</div>

<div align="center">*I am not a member of any organized party – I am a Democrat.*
-- Will Rogers</div>

From New Politics to New Democrats

In March 1980, *The New Republic* ran a front-page editorial urging the Democratic Party

to "bring back the pols." Reflecting the generalized dissatisfaction with the widely

perceived incompetence of the Carter administration, the editors of one of the leading

weeklies of American liberalism looked upon the upcoming presidential election pitting

the Democratic incumbent against Ronald Reagan with a sense of despondency. The

"major reason" for the discouraging state of American politics, they argued, was "the

triumph of the movement known as 'new politics.'"

> The product of idealistic impulses, worthy motives, and some real political
> necessities, the new politics reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s has
> contributed to the decline of political parties, has made the media the
> arbiter of political quality, has trivialized political debate, has virtually
> disqualified conscientious officeholders from presidential contention, and
> has created rigid procedures instead of the flexibility and openness it
> promised.[1]

While the authors lauded the New Politics for "opening" national conventions to

women and racial minorities, they attacked the reformers for abolishing the institution's

"deliberative function." "Delegates now merely ratify the results of primaries. They

decide nothing." The New Politics had also "forced rigid and extreme views on the

Democratic party" by "virtually bann[ing] state party leaders from automatic positions of

influence at conventions and at other phases of the presidential nominating process."

---

[1] Editorial, "Bring Back the Pols," *The New Republic*, 22 March 1980.

Democratic Party professionals now had "no ability to act as a keel for a party blown by popular winds." Well-intentioned though they might have been, the reforms ultimately "created a cleavage between what it takes to run successfully for president and what is required to be a successful president."[2]

The solution, they continued, was not a return to the "old politics" of closed-door meetings, arbitrary decision making, boss rule, and the absence of written rules, but rather a process of "readjusting the new politics reforms in the direction of the old politics," restoring "what was solid in the old system." While the authors urged the upcoming Democratic convention to consider implementing new rules to roll back the growing number of state primaries in favor of party-building caucuses, they foregrounded the need to increase the "influence of party leaders and elected officeholders" in the nomination process. If the latter were granted uncommitted delegate seats, they proposed, presidential aspirants would feel pressure to cultivate the good graces of elected officials and party officeholders – at least to the same extent as the media and narrowly focused candidate enthusiasts. "Good government," they concluded, "requires experience, knowledge, steadiness, and depth." Who better to review these qualities in a potential president than experienced, knowledgeable party professionals?[3]

The logic of *The New Republic* editorial proved prescient. The 1980 presidential election delivered a new depth of defeat for the Democratic Party. While the 1968 election had been a narrow loss for Vice President Hubert Humphrey, and 1972 a landslide defeat for an insurgent candidate against an incumbent, 1980 was not only a landslide loss for Jimmy Carter but also the first time a sitting Democratic president had

---

[2] Editorial, "Bring Back the Pols."
[3] Editorial, "Bring Back the Pols."

failed in his reelection bid since 1888. To top it off, the Democrats saw their majority in the House substantially reduced and lost control of the Senate for the first time since 1949. Whatever optimism had returned to the Democratic Party with denying Nixon any coattails effect in 1972, sweeping Congress in 1974, and retaking the White House in 1976 had been swept away in the earthquake that marked the beginning of the Reagan revolution.

Such a stinging defeat at the polls provided fertile ground for the soul searching that the editors of *The New Republic* had encouraged at the beginning of 1980. In a post-election exit interview with the *Washington Post*, senior assistant to President Carter, Anne Wexler – a veteran of the New Politics movement – embraced the view that placed primary responsibility for the disarray of the Democratic Party on the New Politics.

> [W]hen you look at the [Democratic national] convention what you see is a collection of interest groups. You don't see a political party anymore. … It's because of the reforms. And it's because of the dominance of the most activist people.[4]

Yet another reformer, James MacGregor Burns, also saw a corrosive effect resulting from the party reforms imposed by the New Politics movement. This was less a matter of unintended consequences than it was a fundamental flaw in the project to democratize the party in the first place. "The reformers did not understand that the imperative task … was less to rectify or redeem [the party] than to repair and regenerate it. … Carried along by the anti-Establishment spirit of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the reformers tried to

---

[4] Meg Greenfield, "Reflecting on Feminism, Politics, and the Democratic Party," *Washington Post*, 9 December 1980.

cleanse the presidential primary system of its exclusive and elitist elements rather than contain it."[5]

Clearly, by the early 1980s many American liberals had become disillusioned with the reform politics of the previous era, including some of its most prominent participants. These critiques, however, reveal a selective remembering of what the New Politics movement was about and reflect a certain nostalgia for what the party was like before it was reformed. While it may at first seem to constitute a paradox, critiques such as these give both too little as well as too much credit to the New Politics movement in the Democratic Party. On the one hand, the liberal skeptics implicitly collapse the *outcome* of the struggle to reform the party with the *intentions* of the reformers. As the editors at *The New Republic* framed it above, the problems afflicting American politics at the turn of the 1980s were attributable to the "triumph" of the New Politics. But as we have seen, the record of the New Politics in the Democratic Party fell far short of "triumph." In fact, the reformers' greatest failure was in not institutionalizing the "deliberative" party conventions that their critics, liberal and conservative alike, accuse them of dismantling. This was not due to their "anti-establishment spirit," but due to the "triumph" of the anti-reform coalition of officeholders, state party chairs, labor leaders, and neoconservative intellectuals organized under the banner of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. A national party organization that effectively "decides nothing" was not the goal of the New Politics movement, but a product of the struggle inside the party, which the New Politics largely lost.

---

[5] James MacGregor Burns, "Coming to the Aid of the Party," *Psychology Today*, July 1984, Box 285, Folder 6, National Women's Political Caucus Records, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

On the other hand, the liberal skeptics of party reform also give too much historical agency to the New Politics movement in the breakup of the New Deal coalition. Again, as we have seen, the political regime that the Democratic coalition constructed in the 1930s and 1940s eventual succumbed to its own internal contradictions, which married a universalistic, "rights revolutionary" liberalism with a sociopolitical bloc premised on second-class citizenship for African Americans. The explosion of those contradictions in the 1960s, and the spread of the rights revolution beyond the limitations imposed by Democratic Party structure, destroyed the foundations of the New Deal order's continuing hegemony within American politics. Combined with the parallel crisis of the postwar political economy, the end of the New Deal opened up a period of sustained contestation for rival political projects throughout the 1970s. While it is no doubt true that by 1980 one could look at the Democrats and see "a collection of interest groups" rather than a unified political party, this points more to the unresolved nature of the crisis attending the end of the New Deal order than to the "dominance" of New Politics activists. Had New Politics activists in fact "dominated" the party reform process through the middle and late 1970s, the institutionalization of their envisioned party framework – in the form of regional organizations, national midterm policy conferences, and a policy agenda to move "beyond the New Deal" and toward full employment – may have been able to "repair and regenerate" a majoritarian Democratic project.

However, before the outcome of the 1980 election confirmed what many had feared, that the Democratic Party crisis of 1968 continued to persist, the national convention heeded the advice imparted by the editorial team at *The New Republic* and voted to create yet another reform commission to reconsider the party's presidential

nomination process. The disastrous outcome of the election only reinforced the urgency of its task of revitalizing the party. Chaired by North Carolina governor James Hunt, a newly appointed Commission on Presidential Nominations had at the top of its agenda the elevation of party leaders and elected officials within the nomination process.[6] As one white paper authored by a group of California Democrats put it, "by bringing the process 'to the people,' the Democratic Party has lost its leadership, collective vision, and ties to the past."[7] In appointing the seventy-member Commission, DNC chair Charles Manatt, former chair of the California Democratic Party, screened every appointee to ensure that the body as a whole "held no strong reservations against expanding the role of party professionals" in delegate selection.[8]

That Manatt was determined to return the party to power through increasing the influence of party professionals was confirmed soon after his election as DNC chair. With the help and support of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Manatt passed a resolution through the DNC Executive Committee to restrict attendance to the 1982 midterm conference, as mandated by the 1980 convention, to only party officials or their appointees, overturning the convention's decision that at least two-thirds of the conference delegates be elected at the congressional district level.[9] By effectively removing any direct participation by grassroots party activists, Manatt assured an even more inconsequential midterm conference than the one in 1978. And, in fact, when Democratic delegates arrived in

---

[6] William G. Mayer, "Superdelegates: Reforming the Reforms Revisited," in Steven S. Smith and Melanie J. Springer, eds, *Reforming the Presidential Nomination Process* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 91; David E. Price, *Bringing Back the Parties* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984), 160.

[7] Quoted in Branko Marcetic, "The Secret History of Super Delegates," *In These Times*, 16 May 2016.

[8] William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), 89.

[9] "Democrats Votes to Restrict Size of Midterm Convention," *Toledo Blade*, 7 June 1981; Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 346.

Philadelphia in December 1982 it was decided by a vote that due to costs no further midterm policy conferences would be held. That such a top-down scuttling of even nominally participatory party organs raised no organized outcry from reformers speaks to the virtual disappearance of anything called the New Politics movement.

Within only six months after commencing its deliberations in August 1981, the Hunt Commission had held four regional hearings, three full Commission meetings, and issued its final report. In terms of demographic representation, the Commission maintained the 1973 mandate that state parties receive advanced approval for affirmative action plans for racial minorities and people under thirty. (Due to the efforts of the National Women's Political Caucus and the success of the women's movement more generally, the 1980 convention had mandated "equal division" of delegates between men and women. However, because this built on the tradition of equal division within the DNC, dating back to the 1920s, it was perceived by party moderates as "not a quota.")[10] The Hunt Commission also maintained the McGovern-Fraser and Mikulski Commissions' ban on the use of winner-take-all mechanisms in the presidential nomination system, despite the sustained attacks on proportional representation launched by the CDM in the 1970s and the continued broadsides it received as a "foreign idea" within the Commission's deliberations.[11]

The singular contribution of the Hunt Commission, however, was its revision of the McGovern-Fraser guidelines' abolition of automatic delegate status for party officials and officeholders, and the creation of what has come to be called "superdelegates." As

---

[10] Interview with Donald Fowler (phone), 18 May 2016; Lanny Davis, "Reforming the Reforms," *The New Republic*, 17 February 1982. See also, William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), 137.
[11] See, for instance, the Testimony of William B. James to the Hunt Commission on Presidential Nominations, Box 282, Folder 3, NWPC Records.

we have seen, the attendance rate of high level party officeholders, such as governors, senators, and House representatives at the party's national conventions had fallen dramatically with the revocation of automatic delegate status in 1972. While McGovern had gone down to a dramatic defeat at the polls and the New Politics had been unable to dominate the presidential nomination thereafter, high ranking Democratic officials had not returned to the conventions. In fact, as Table 9.1 below demonstrates, with the partial exception of Democratic governors, even greater proportions of top party leaders withdrew their participation from national conventions in 1976 and 1980 than had those in 1972.

Table 9.1: Participation of Major Democratic Elected Officials as Delegates at National Democratic Conventions, 1968-84 (%)[12]

Year	Governors	Senators	Representatives
1968	92	67	36
1972	67	35	15
1976	44	18	15
1980	74	14	14
1984	83	62	66

Source: Mayer, "Superdelegates," 88, Table 5-2.

As we have seen, the moderate and conservative party members had been trying to pull leading officeholders back into the national conventions since 1973. The Mikulski Commission had made the first, partial step in the direction of reinstituting automatic delegate status when it extended an automatic *invitation* to top level Democrats, but without granting them full voting rights. The Winograd Commission went a step further when it reserved 10 percent of each state's delegation for party officials, but continued to

---

[12] The percentages presented here differ slightly from those presented in chapter 6 above. This is due to whether primary consideration is given to if party officeholders participated as *delegates* at the convention (here) or if they merely attended the convention as *guests or delegates* (chapter 6).

require they attend conventions as *pledged* delegates. These revisions, however, evidently did little to stanch the bleeding of top officeholders or, as is evident from the outcome of the 1980 presidential election, introduce enough "experienced and knowledgeable" professionals to save the party from defeat.

The Hunt Commission took bolder steps than its predecessors in rolling back the McGovern-Fraser ban on automatic delegates. While it did not lift the ban as such, the Commission reserved another 20 percent for *unpledged* party leaders and elected officeholders (on top of the 10 percent of committed party leaders added by the Winograd Commission). Emphasizing the necessity of restoring automatic delegate privileges to party insiders, Hunt commissioner and future vice-presidential nominee Geraldine Ferrero said, "The bottom-line question is whether you want them to go [to the national convention]. Either they're going to go as uncommitted delegates or they won't go."[13] Louisiana representative Gillis Long and his aide Al From introduced the recommendation for the superdelegate category in order "to temper the influence of interest group leaders and party activists in the nominating process."[14] Both the AFL-CIO and the Association of State Democratic Chairs (ASDC) proposed making the new superdelegate category as much as 30 percent of all convention seats, bringing the total of *guaranteed* seats for party officials and officeholders up to 40 percent of the national convention. After drawing fire from the women's caucus for the provision's likely violation of the "equal division" mandate, because most top officials and party leaders were men, the proportion was lowered in a compromise. As is clear from the data presented in Table 9.1 above, the advent of superdelegates in 1984 not only reversed the

---

[13] Ferrero, quoted in Price, *Bringing Back the Parties*, 167.

[14] Al From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43.

decline of party leaders and officeholders participating in the national conventions, in the case of Democratic Representatives it brought it to new heights.

As Table 9.2 shows below, the total number and proportion of superdelegates as participants at national conventions has continued to grow since their introduction in 1984. This has been a product of the gradual relaxation of the terms of the original Hunt Commission compromise as women and people of color have gained greater presence in the upper ranks of the party hierarchy. By gradually raising the ceiling on the proportion of superdelegates, as well as the absolute number of convention delegates, the category has been extended to not only all Democratic governors, members of the House and Senate, the Democratic National Committee, but also all former "distinguished" party officeholders such as presidents, vice presidents, congressional leaders, and chairs of the DNC.

TABLE 9.2: Superdelegates at the Democratic National Conventions, 1984-2008

Year	Number of superdelegates	Total number of delegates	Percentage of superdelegates
1984	568	3,933	14.4
1988	645	4,162	15.5
1992	772	4,288	18.0
1996	777	4,298	18.1
2000	802	4,399	18.5
2004	802	4,322	18.6
2008	853	4,419	19.3

Source: Mayer, "Superdelegates," 94, Table 5-4.

But the advent of superdelegates quickly proved to be no panacea for the ills of the Democratic Party in the 1980s. While the participation of senators and representatives improved dramatically for the 1984 convention, the presidential nominee, former vice president Walter Mondale, went down to a humiliating defeat against President Reagan,

carrying only his home state of Minnesota as well as the District of Columbia. In the aftermath of that defeat, Al From drafted a memo for Representative Long to be presented to a dinner of concerned party officials and public officeholders, convened "to discuss the future of the Democratic Party." Al From's diagnosis was as bleak as his recommendations were far-reaching:

> As a national party, Democrats are in deep trouble. … We cannot afford to become a liberal party; our message must attract moderates and conservatives, as well. … As elected officials and party leaders, we need to do a better job of steering our party away from trouble. … [The] lessons of this election all point to one thing: the need for our party to change, and change drastically. We need a new image; we need a new structure; and we need new spokesmen. If we don't act now to develop and promote a new message, to rid the party of the cancer of single interest and single constituency caucuses, to showcase new leaders, to establish a nominating procedure that produces a candidate who can win a general election, then we are destined to become a minority party for the foreseeable future.[15]

Al From cultivated a bloc of support for his vision to remake the Democratic Party within the Democratic House Caucus as well as the Democratic Governors Association. However, when From found little interest among members of the DNC, he founded the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which, he asserted, should "simply assume" the role of authority in party policymaking so that "we could operate without any party constraints at all."[16] The DLC would come to attract future party leaders such as Al Gore and Bill Clinton. It saw its role as "modernizing liberalism" for a post-New Deal era – a project From described as "saving liberalism from its excesses."[17]

---

[15] From, *The New Democrats*, 50-1.
[16] From, *The New Democrats*, 52-3.
[17] From, *The New Democrats*, 113, 75.

Shortly after forming the Democratic Leadership Council, From and his DLC co-founder Will Marshall met with the senior leadership of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority: Penn Kemble, Peter Rosenblatt, and Ben Wattenberg. As we have seen, the CDM had become much less visibly involved in the struggle over party reform in the second half of the 1970s. During that time, the organization had assumed a sharply critical position to the right of the Carter administration, especially regarding foreign policy. Ironically, while the CDM has fashioned its critique of the New Politics as a means to draw back to the party those white, especially male, working class voters later dubbed "Reagan Democrats," many prominent CDM members, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Max Kampleman, Richard Shifter, Wattenberg, and others all accepted foreign affairs related positions in the Reagan administration.[18] The subject of discussion at the DLC-CDM meeting was the potential merger of the two intraparty organizations. But while the proposed merger never came to be, the meeting between the leaderships of the DLC and the CDM illustrated the continuity linking the two groups.[19] Indeed, Al From acknowledged that it was the experience of the CDM in the 1970s that had inspired the formation of the DLC in the first place.[20]

The DLC was in fact taking up the project of pulling the party away from the New Politics where the CDM had left off. The CDM had paved the way for the DLC by effectively halting the advance of the New Politics movement and neutralizing its institutional reforms. Moreover, the DLC appropriated some of the same substantive

---

[18] See Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010), chapter 6.

[19] From, *The New Democrats*, 60. At the meeting the CDMers encouraged From and Marshall to take up the fight against the recent "equal division" mandate dividing convention delegates equally between men and women. However, the DLC founders balked at taking on a fight that would only highlight how few women were in their own organization, and one which they felt they were likely to lose anyway.

[20] Ben J. Wattenberg, *Fighting Words: A Tale of How Liberals Created Neo-Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 148.

critiques that the CDM had fashioned in its war against the New Politics. This was most evident in the DLC's first major programmatic statement, *The Politics of Evasion*, produced in the aftermath of the Democrats' 1988 debacle: the defeat of presidential nominee, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. Drafted by William Galston and Elaine Kamarck, yet another protégé of CDM-supporter Nelson Polsby's, the DLC manifesto elaborated Al From's diagnosis of the party crisis.

> Democrats must now come face to face with reality: too many Americans have come to see the party as inattentive to their economic interests, indifferent if not hostile to their moral sentiments, and ineffective in defense of their national security. … Democrats have ignored [this] fundamental problem. This systematic denial of reality – the politics of evasion – continues unabated today. … It reflects the interests of those who would rather be the majority in a minority party than risk being the minority in a majority party.[21]

The authors identified the root of the politics of evasion in the "liberal fundamentalism" that began with the "influx of upscale anti-war activists into the 'reformed' 1972 convention and [which] continu[es] to this day."[22] Like the CDM before them, the DLC argued that by moving to the left since the late 1960s, the Democrats had moved away from where the majority of voters were. Strategies premised on mobilizing new voters suggested by the remaining elements of the New Politics movement, such as Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, were flawed. The simple facts, they argued, were that the party's open nominating system reflected the influence of "upscale liberals" and

---

[21] William Galston and Elaine Kamarck, *The Politics of Evasion: Democrats and the Presidency* (Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute, 1989), 3, available at www.progressivepolicy.org. See also, Kenneth S. Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2000), 161-2; Curtin Atkins, "Forging a New Democratic Party: The Politics of the Third Way from Clinton to Obama" (PhD diss., York University, 2015), 138-41.
[22] Galston and Kamarck, *The Politics of Evasion*, 3, 17.

produced candidates "without significant appeal to the demographic and political center."[23] However, these conclusions were no less selective and misleading in hands of the DLC in the 1980s than they had been in the hands of the CDM in the 1970s.

For all the commonalities, however, there were significant differences between the CDM and the DLC in terms of their aims and their relative success. While the CDM ultimately triumphed over its New Politics opponents in the battle over party structure, the self-declared defenders of "vital center" liberalism failed to consolidate a new Democratic regime in the wake of the New Deal's collapse. They ultimately found a more comfortable home in Reagan's anti-New Deal administration than they did in the mélange of "special interest groups" that composed the 1980s Democratic coalition. The DLC, by contrast, not only inherited the fruits of this previous struggle, but did effectively install their own New Democratic vision of the party and redefine the parameters of centrist liberalism. While the CDM won decisive battles against the New Politics' institutional reforms, the DLC won the war of ideas.

Whereas the CDM and other cold war liberals looked back with nostalgia on the New Deal Democratic Party's political hegemony of the postwar period, New Democrats explicitly rejected any possible return to the party's golden age. If their broad goal of reconstructing a majority party capable of retaking the presidency was the same, the coalition that would sustain that effort nevertheless differed considerably. New Democrats directed their appeals toward the new dynamic economic sectors and boomtowns of the sunbelt South, such as North Carolina's Research Triangle and California's Silicon Valley, but also to those northern suburbs surrounding the high tech corridors of Massachusetts' Route 128 and the professionals occupying the post-

---

[23] Galston and Kamarck, *The Politics of Evasion*, 6, 7.

industrial landscape of rust belt cities.[24] They articulated a vision of restoring American international competitiveness that promised continued progressive domestic programs at home (tempered ominously with respect for "law and order") within an increasingly interconnected, globalized world. Promising to carve out a third way between Reagan Republicanism and New Politics liberalism, the New Democrats sought to return the party of the New Deal to power by turning it into a party of neoliberalism.

Labor and Democracy in the Democratic Party

In November 1981, a year after Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency of the United States, the AFL-CIO held its annual convention in Washington, DC, ushering in a new era of leadership for the union federation. Outgoing president George Meany, who at the age of 79 had held the position for twenty-six years, passed the baton to his long-time protégé Lane Kirkland, while Committee on Political Education (COPE) director Al Barkan did the same with his top lieutenant, John Perkins. Yet while the new leaders had supported their former bosses' campaign against the New Politics movement in the 1970s, they came to power at the beginning of the new decade in a spirit of reconciliation with the new social forces mobilized since the late 1960s. This was a product of both the success of the anti-reformers in blocking the most ambitious items of the New Politics agenda, such as their original proposal for a new party structure, as well as the general recognition that any attempt to turn the clock back to the smoke-filled rooms of elite brokerage was futile. New labor-sponsored initiatives, such as a Solidarity Day of mass demonstrations of 250,000 union members in front of the Capitol in September 1981,

---

[24] John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeria, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002); Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

seemed to indicate that the new AFL-CIO leadership was going to turn over a new leaf and accommodate itself to the New Politics-oriented trade unions, their diverse memberships, and become a unified force for mass mobilization in the age of Reagan. Further, Perkins sought to innovate COPE's campaign operations, decentralizing much of its financial and informational apparatus to state and local organizations, as well as individual unions. He also established the Labor Institute for Public Affairs to better equip the AFL-CIO to generate a competitive media presence. Meanwhile, in response to the anti-democratic charges lodged against the AFL-CIO's decisionmaking process in the wake of Meany's "neutrality policy" concerning the 1972 presidential race, Kirkland relocated political endorsement decisionmaking power from the federation's then thirty-five member Executive Council to the AFL-CIO General Board, composed of all ninety-nine affiliated union presidents, with votes weighted according to the size of their memberships.[25]

However, if there were glimmers of a new kind of American unionism in the passage of power from the AFL-CIO old guard to the new, the Kirkland-Perkins leadership also sought to reestablish as best they could a bargaining relationship with the leadership of the Democratic Party. While the smoke-filled rooms at the nominating conventions had been dismantled, the union federation sought to gain a foothold in the reformed DNC, eventually picking up thirty-five seats of the 325-member national committee, and four seats on the party's 35-member Executive Committee. From there, the labor members of the party's governance structure supported the Hunt Commission's

---

[25] Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 126-9.

advent of superdelegates as well as its other reforms, which it saw as essential steps in restoring the Democrats to national power.

That organized labor as a whole was able to coordinate and unify around popular candidates in 1984, 1988, and 1992 suggests that Meany and Barkan's fears of being disadvantaged by the party reforms of the early 1970s were misplaced. While the shift to participatory primaries and caucuses did redound to the benefit of certain unions, such as the United Auto Workers, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the National Education Association, and the Communication Workers, who were willing and able to adapt to the new system of party influence, the defeats of 1972 and 1980 appear to have convinced the reform wing of the labor leadership that trade union unity was paramount if the party was going to halt and reverse the Reagan administration's attack on organized labor. Indeed, by the late 1980s it was clear that even the non-reformist AFL-CIO unions had adapted to the new nominating system, deploying their campaign apparatuses within the primaries and coordinating their efforts behind acceptable candidates.[26] While all unions continued to encounter their historic limitations in educating and mobilizing their mass base, the fears that labor had been deinstitutionalized from the Democratic Party appeared to have been overblown.

Even if labor was not cast out of the party at the hands of the New Politics movement, the fortunes of labor have continued to sink despite the party's successful return to the White House in 1992, 1996, 2008, and 2012. As shown in Figure 9.1 below,

---

[26] Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, 133.

labor union density has continued its secular decline since the mid-1950s, coming to represent only 11.1 percent in 2015.[27]

FIGURE 9.1: Total Union Membership in the United States as a Percentage of the Labor Force, 1983-2015
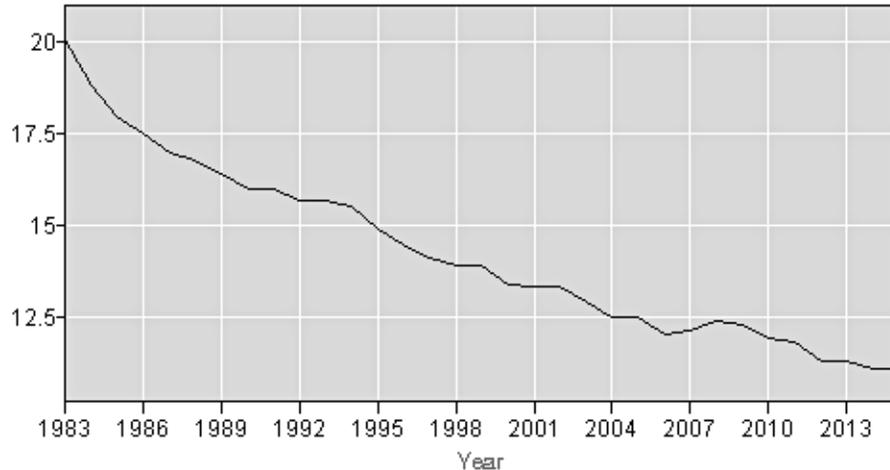
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Yet the continuing fall in union density over the last thirty years, while important in itself, is not the best indicator of the general decline of organized labor as a powerful force in American politics. More significant has been the adoption of a neoliberal policy agenda by the DLC-influenced Democratic Party leadership, placing organized labor in the contradictory position of "lesser evilism": continually campaigning on behalf of presidential nominees who endorse but ultimately fail to support labor's priority legislative items, without a realistic option of throwing their support to a Republican Party that has moved farther and farther to the right at each election. The enactment of free trade agreements, welfare reform, as well as the failure of labor law reform, such as

---

[27] Figure 9.1 measures union density for public and private union members. This somewhat distorts the real trends at work in both private and public sectors: exaggerating the density of private sector unions and diminishing that of public sector unions.

the Employee Free Choice Act, has come from Democratic administrations nominally sympathetic to organized labor's aims.

This development forces us to reevaluate the central and superficially plausible claim of the critics of the New Politics movement: *did the democratization of the Democratic Party harm working class politics in the United States?* After all, as we have seen, the New Deal regime of the 1930s brought American workers into the political process in an unprecedented way, integrating them as a virtual electoral apparatus of the Democratic Party. While there were shortcomings to the compromised New Deal regime of which they were a part, such as the primacy it gave to white male breadwinners, the period of the 1930s to the mid-1960s saw rising median wages, increasing unionization, and greater cultural prestige and cachet accorded to labor as a legitimate representative force in American politics and society more generally. Additionally, while organized labor never scored the legislative victories its Washington lobbyists most prized, such as labor law reform, its spillover effects in support of the civil rights movement, the early student movement, and, by the mid-1970s, the women's movement were all beneficial contributions to the betterment of American workers both inside and outside the ranks of organized labor.

Are the reforms responsible for the decline of effective working class politics in the United States? For the critics of the New Politics, beginning with the CDM in the mid-1970s and continuing to echo in the supplementary academic scholarship, participatory democracy was bound to disadvantage the voice of poor and working class people in the political sphere. As we have seen, from the perspective of its detractors,

participatory democracy was inherently "an upper middle class sport."[28] There is a seductive logic underpinning such a perspective: if the requisite resources to participate in politics, such as knowledge, time, education, and self-confidence, are not distributed equally throughout society, then more open decision-making procedures will inevitably benefit those in possession of such resources. In this sense, the neoconservative critics agree with the New Politics in viewing institutional arrangements as structures that are never neutral in their effects. It was not that the pre-reformed Democratic Party was a neutral playing field, open to all, which the New Politics inappropriately attempted to tilt in their favor. No critic defended the pre-1968 party in those terms. Rather, it was a party that had been institutionally biased toward working class interests, at least in the terms that the leaders of the AFL-CIO interpreted them. That this was not the result of an internally democratic party decision-making process was irrelevant. What was important was the effectiveness the politics of elite brokerage had in securing representation for the otherwise voiceless poor and working class people in American politics.

Underlying the critics' arguments against the New Politics' party reforms is a notion of democracy that Robert Dahl has appropriately labeled "guardianship."[29] For the anti-reformers, mass participation of poor and working class people in political decisionmaking is an impractical and unrealistic goal. Recognizing that political resources are unequally distributed in American society, the critics have held that the optimal set of institutional arrangements is one in which those who are best able to bargain on behalf of the disadvantaged are duly given the authority to do so. By

---

[28] CDM member, quoted in "Power Struggle," *The New Republic*, 16 December 1972. See also, Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage, 1983), 530.
[29] Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 69.

dislodging party and interest groups leaders from the smoke-filled backrooms of the convention hall, they conclude, the New Politics reformers effectively destroyed the institutional basis of working class politics in America.

While the logic of the guardianship argument has some plausibility to it, its fundamental premises are flawed. On the one hand, the present weakness of labor as an organized force in American politics has much more to do with the *incapacity of the labor movement* than it does with the new intraparty bargaining structures produced by the reformers. Neither returning to the smoke-filled rooms of the pre-reform period nor the launching of a third party will reverse this trend. Technical alterations of rules or the invention of wholly new institutions cannot resolve what is essentially a social problem: the decline of labor as a dynamic popular movement, one that has the capacity to secure policy victories whose effects spread far beyond its membership. This, of course, is partly the result of past failures, particularly labor's inability to repeal Taft-Hartley's limitations of the Wagner Act. But it is also a product of the internal limitations of the labor movement, even when it was a strong, dynamic force fighting for civil rights in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Organized labor's inability to effectively educate its members and bring them on board with its social democratic policy agenda imposed internal obstacles to its ability to lead the wide array of progressive forces that exploded in the late 1960s. Instead, its dependence on mechanisms of elite brokerage with political leaders hampered its ability to ally with the New Politics movement and its project to democratize the Democratic Party.

A New Politics for the Twenty-First Century?

With the presidential administration of Bill Clinton in the 1990s, many have interpreted the election of one of their own to the presidency of the United States as the signal triumph of the New Democrats party faction. However, it is more accurate to view the election of Barack Obama in 2008 as the evidence of the ultimate achievement of the New Democrats within the Democratic Party. Despite his narrow victory over another Clinton in the nomination process, Obama's post-partisan, post-ideological centrism reflected just how extensively the New Democrats' "third way" ideology had permeated the political mainstream, constituting a new "common sense" within the Democratic Party and American society as a whole.[30] Indeed, so close was Obama's policy agenda to that of Hillary Clinton, the former distinguished himself from the latter only on matters of image, brand, and political style. Midway through Obama's first term as president, the DLC officially closed its doors. As Al From later put it, "we had accomplished our mission and there was no reason to keep it going."[31]

The principle of guardianship underpinning the critics' attack on participatory democracy represented a call for political quietism amidst a period of upsurge that had many conservative commentators openly speculating about the governability of democratic polities.[32] But even beyond the immediate context of the democratic insurgencies of the late 1960s and 1970s, the critics share a deeper skepticism regarding the central premise of participatory politics, which continues to affect politics in the twenty-first century. As Carole Pateman has put it, "The major function of participation

---

[30] Atkins, "Forging a New Democratic Party."
[31] From, *The New Democrats*, 255.
[32] See The Trilateral Commission, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

in the theory of participatory democracy is … an educative one," in the sense that participation provides the "social training" necessary for cultivating democratic attitudes and the experience of collective decision making. In this way, "participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it."[33] Moreover, it hypothetically also produces integrative effects, building a shared collective identity among participants, as well as the social capital that cultivates community, trust, and individual acceptance of collective decisions.

Yet advocates of participatory democracy recognize the central tension behind the critics' skepticism: that "for a democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist."[34] It would seem, then, that participatory reforms, such as those envisioned and engineered by the New Politics movement, are confronted with a conundrum: without a participatory society – that is, without a broadly equitable distribution of the means to participate effectively – participatory political structures will bias those with relatively more resources while disadvantaging those with less.

While this presents democratic reformers with a real *tension* that needs to be taken seriously, it does not present a genuine dead end. As we have seen, members of the New Politics movement took notice of the problem of unequal distribution of resources, although its extent far surpassed the means available to address it. At the very outset of the reform process, as the McGovern-Fraser Commission listened to testimony of the limits to political participation, the horizons of reform did occasionally stretch beyond the traditional boundaries of politics to the need for societal conditions, which constrain civic engagement, to be changed if a more deeply democratic party was to be built. Moreover,

---

[33] Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 42-3
[34] Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, 43.

some of those testimonials also pointed to the need for parties to act less as electoral institutions dedicated to the winning of office and more as educative agencies in American public life, which not only offered up candidates for office but more generally took responsibility for developing the democratic capacities of the citizenry.

That the New Politics movement failed to transform the Democratic Party into a type of party that could take on such challenges is not surprising. Given the obstacles it faced within and without its own structures, its transformative project suffered insuperable limits. But while the New Politics movement in the Democratic Party does not offer a twenty-first century blueprint for achieving its laudable goals, it does point in the right direction, not in the immediate sense of reforming the Democratic Party, but in the sense of creating a political agent whose priority is building the democratic capacities of citizens to participate meaningfully in the decisions that effect changes in their lives.

As the 2016 Democratic primary campaign between Senator Bernie Sanders and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has already indicated, the inability of the nascent anti-neoliberal coalition to break into the mainstream and challenge the prevailing common sense has already begun to fashion a critique of the undemocratic practices of the Democratic Party. While their criticism of the role of superdelegates in helping clinch the nomination for Clinton is only the tip of the iceberg, it does indicate that the problem of democracy in America's political parties may not remain only a historical curiosity for long.

But as this dissertation has also sought to make clear, if the lack of party democracy is identified as an obstacle thwarting the transformation of society, *party democratization* is no panacea. Indeed, the experience of the New Politics in the

Democratic Party also serves as a cautionary tale, not in the normative sense that party amateurs have no business interfering in the affairs of seasoned professionals, but in the sense that democratization is likely to create as many problems as it is meant to resolve. None of the internal tensions that inhere in modern political parties are likely to disappear through a process of democratization. On the contrary, it may well exacerbate them.

Without dismissing the intimate connections between political institutions and social relations, we must examine critically the tendency to view *technical* changes to organization – whether relatively minor, in the case of reforming superdelegate rules, or major, such as substituting a new third party for the Democrats – as measures that actually evade the more central question of building the *social forces* capable of shifting the balance of political power. This perspective tends to neglect the central role of *politics* in the formation of social groups and movements, implicitly suggesting that such a coalition already exists, waiting to be tapped. While the experience of the New Politics movement tells us that pursuing a new progressive agenda must be accompanied by democratization of our political institutions, the latter will face insurmountable odds if it is not sustained by dynamic social movement. If societal conditions constrain citizen participation in democratic institutions, then those conditions should be transformed. Internally democratic parties are not sufficient agents in this process, but they are essential.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MANUSCRIPT AND ARCHIVAL SOURCES

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations. Records. George
      Meany Memorial Archive, University of Maryland, Silver Springs, Maryland.

Americans for Democratic Action. Records. Wisconsin State Historical Society,
      University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Democratic National Committee. Records. National Archives and Records Service,
      Washington, DC.

Democratic Socialists of America. Records. Tamiment Library, New York University,
      New York, New York.

Fraser, Donald M. Papers. Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Fraser, Douglas. Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit,
      Michigan.

Hawkins, Augustus. Oral History Interview. UCLA Oral History Program.

Humphrey, Hubert H. Papers. Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Jeffrey, Mildred. Papers. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit,
      Michigan.

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Stuart Eizenstat Papers.
- Office of Domestic Policy Staff Papers.
- Charles Schultze Papers.
- Rick Hutcheson Papers.
- Speechwriters Staff Office Papers.
- Betty Rainwater Papers.
- Reverend James Wall Papers.

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Lawrence O'Brien Personal Papers.
- Robert Kennedy Papers.
- Frank Mankiewicz Papers.
- Abram Chayes Papers.

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.
- George Reedy Oral History.

- Aaron Henry Oral History.
- James Farmer Oral History.
- Lawrence O'Brien Oral History.

McGovern, George S. Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

National Women's Political Caucus. Records. Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

O'Hara, James G. Collection. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Reuther, Victor. Collection. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Schlossberg, Steven. Papers. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Staebler, Neil E. Collection. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Woodcock, Leonard. Papers. Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

INTERVIEWS

Fowler, Donald. Phone. 4 April 2016; 18 May 2016.

Fraser, Arvonne and Donald Fraser. Minneapolis, 24 November 2014.

Mondale, Walter F. Minneapolis, 1 December 2014.

Siegel, Mark. Phone. 15 April 2016.

PERIODICALS

Commentary
New York Times
The Nation
The New Republic
Wall Street Journal
Washington Post

BOOKS, ARTICLES, DISSERTATIONS

Ahmed, Amel. "Reading History Forward: The Origins of Electoral Systems in European Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (2010): 1059-88.

Aldrich, John H. *Why Parties? A Second Look*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

American Political Science Association. *Towards a More Responsible Party System: A Report of the Committee on Political Parties*. New York: Reinhart, 1950.

Andelic, Patrick. "Donkey Work: Redefining the Democratic Party in an 'Age of Conservatism.'" Ph.D diss., Oxford University, 2015.

Atkins, Curtis. "Forging a New Democratic Party: The Politics of the Third Way from Clinton to Obama." PhD diss., York University, 2015.

Baer, Kenneth S. *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2000.

Bailey, Stephen Kemp. *Congress Makes a Law: The Story Behind the Employment Act of 1946*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1950.

Banfield, Edward C. "Party 'Reform' in Retrospect." In *Political Parties in the Eighties*, edited by Robert A. Goodwin, 20-33. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1980.

Barrow, Clyde W. *Toward a Critical Theory of States: The Poulantzas-Miliband Debate After Globalization*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016.

Bartels, Larry M. *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*. New York: Russell Sage, 2008.

Bass, Harold F. Jr. "Presidential Party Leadership and Party Reform: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Abrogation of the Two-Thirds Rule." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18 (1988): 303-17.

———. "Presidential Party Leadership and Party Reform: Lyndon B. Johnson and the MFDP Controversy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21 (1991): 85-101.

Battista, Andrew. *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Bawn, Kathleen, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands, and Nominations in American Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (2012): 571-97.

Baylor, Christopher A. "First to the Party: The Group Origins of the Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940-1960." *Studies in American Political Development* 27 (2013): 111-41.

Bell, Daniel. *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. New York: The Free Press, 1960.

Bell, Jonathan and Timothy Stanley, eds. *Making Sense of American Liberalism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

Bensel, Richard Franklin. *The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

———. *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1977-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Biven, W. Carl. *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Bloom, Jack M. *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Boulay, Harvey and Alan DiGaetano. "Why Did Political Machines Disappear?" *Journal of Urban History* 12 (1985): 25-49.

Branch, Taylor. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Brinkley, Alan. *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Broder, David S. "Foreword." In James W. Davis, *National Conventions in an Age of Party Reform*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983.

Brown, Michael K. *Race, Money, and the American Welfare State*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Buffa, Dudley W. *Union Power and American Democracy: The UAW and the Democratic Party, 1935-72*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984.

Burawoy, Michael and Erik Olin Wright. "Sociological Marxism." In *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, edited by Jonathan H. Turner, 459-86. New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.

Burkhart, James and Frank Kendrick, eds. *The New Politics: Mood or Movement?*

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971.

Burnham, Walter Dean. "The United States: The Politics of Heterogeneity." In *Electoral Behavior: A Comparative Handbook*, edited by Richard Rose, 653-725. New York: The Free Press, 1974.

Busch, Andrew E. *Outsiders and Openness in the Presidential Nominating System*. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

Caro, Robert A. *Master of the Senate: The Years of Lyndon Johnson III*. New York: Vintage Books, 2002.

———. *The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson IV*. New York: Vintage, 2012.

Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Carter, Dan T. *The Politics of Rage: George Wallance, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Trasnformation of American Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Cavala, William. "Changing the Rules Changes the Game: Party Reform and the 1972 California Delegates to the Democratic National Convention." *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 27-42.

Ceaser, James W. *Presidential Selection: Theory and Development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Chafe, William H. *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

Chester, Lewis, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page. *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968*. New York: Viking Press, 1969.

Cobble, Dorothy Sue. *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Cohen, Marty, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller. *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Collins, Robert M. *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Congressional Quarterly. *The Presidential Nominating Conventions 1968*. Washington,

DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1968.

Converse, Philip E., Warren E. Miller, Jerrold G. Rusk, and Arthur C. Wolfe. "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election." *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969): 1083-1105.

Cotter, Cornelius P., and Bernard C. Hennessy. *Politics Without Power: The National Party Committees*. New York: Atherton Press, 1964.

Cowan, Geoffrey. *Let the People Rule: Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of the Presidential Primary*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2016.

Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

Cowie, Jefferson, and Nick Salvatore. "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (2008): 3-32.

Crotty, William. *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

———. *Party Reform*. New York: Longman, 1983.

Dahl, Robert A. *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Daniel, Pete. "The New Deal, Southern Agriculture, and Economic Change." In *The New Deal and the South: Essays*, edited by James Charles Cobb and Michael V. Namorato. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984.

Dark, Taylor E. *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Davis, James W. *US Presidential Primaries and the Caucus-Convention System: A Sourcebook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.

Davis, Lanny. *The Emerging Democratic Majority: Lessons and Legacies from the New Politics*. New York: Stein and Day, 1974.

Davis, Mike. *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*. London: Verso, 1986.

de Leon, Cedric. *Party and Society: Reconstructing a Sociology of Democratic Party Politics*. London: Policy, 2014.

de Leon, Cedric, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal. "Political Articulation: The Structured

Creativity of Parties." In *Building Blocs: How Parties Organize Society*, edited by Cedric de Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.

D'Emilio, John. *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Democratic National Committee. *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention 1964*. Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1964.

———. *Official Proceedings of the 1972 Democratic National Convention*, edited by Sheila Hixson and Ruth Rose. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1972.

———. *Official Proceedings of the 1974 Conference on Democratic Party Organization and Policy*, edited by Sheila Hixson. Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1975.

———. *Official Proceedings of the 1976 Democratic National Convention*. Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1976.

DiGaetano, Alan. "The Democratic Party and City Politics in the Postindustrial Era." In *Labor Parties in Postindustrial Societies*, edited by Frances Fox Piven, 212-34. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

———. "Urban Political Reform: Did it Kill the Machine?" *Journal of Urban History* 18 (1991): 37-67.

DiSalvo, Daniel. *Engines of Change: Party Factions in American Politics, 1868-2010*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Downs, Anthony. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1957.

Dorsett, Lyle W. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977.

Draper, Alan. *A Rope of Sand: The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1955-1967*. New York: Praeger, 1989.

Dubofsky, Melvyn. "Jimmy Carter and the End of the Politics of Productivity." In *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, edited by Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham, 95-116. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1998.

Dunn, Susan. *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Dutton, Frederick. *Changing Sources of Power: American Politics in the 1970s*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971.

Duverger, Maurice. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. New York: Wiley & Sons, 1963 [1951].

Edsall, Thomas Byrne. *The New Politics of Inequality*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1984.

Edsall, Thomas Byrne, and Mary D. Edsall. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1991.

Eley, Geoff. *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Epstein, Leon D. *Political Parties in the American Mold*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin press, 1986.

Evans, Peter, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds. *Bringing the State Back In*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Farber, David. *Chicago '68*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Ferguson, Thomas. *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Ferguson, Thomas, and Joel Rogers. *Right turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986.

Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998.

Frank, Thomas. *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. New York: Metropolitan, 2004.

Fraser, Steve. "The 'Labor Question.'" In *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, 55-84. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Frederickson, Kari. *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Freeman, Jo. "Feminism vs. Family Values: Women at the 1992 Democratic and Republican Conventions." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26 (1993): 21-8.

Freeman, Joshua B. *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since WWII*. New York: The New Press, 2000.

From, Al. *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*. New York: Palgrave
      MacMillan, 2013.

Galston, William and Elaine C. Kamarck. *The Politics of Evasion: Democrats and the
      Presidency*. Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute, 1989.

Galvin, Daniel J. *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush*.
      Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Garson, Robert A. *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948*.
      Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974.

Geismer, Lily. *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the
      Democratic Party*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Gerring, John. *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*. Cambridge: Cambridge
      University Press, 1998.

Gerstle, Gary. *Liberty and Coercion: The Paradox of American Government from the
      Founding to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Gillon, Steven M. *The Democrats' Dilemma: Walter F. Mondale and the Liberal Legacy*.
      New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

———. *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985*. New York:
      Oxford University Press, 1987.

Gindin, Sam. *The Canadian Auto Workers: The Birth and Transformation of a Union*.
      Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1995.

Ginsburg, Helen Lachs. "Historical Amnesia: The Humphrey-Hawkins Act, Full
      Employment, and Employment as a Right." *Review of Black Political Economy*
      39 (2012): 121-36.

Goldfield, Michael. "Worker Insurgency, Radical Organization, and New Deal Labor
      Legislation." *American Political Science Review* 83 (1989): 1257-82.

Goldstein, Seth. "Party Leaders, Power and Change." *Party Politics* 8 (2002): 327-48.

Goodwin, Richard N. *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties*. Boston: Little,
      Brown and Company, 1988.

Gosse, Van and Richard Moser, eds. *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in
      Recent America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.

Goulden, Joseph D. *Jerry Wurf: Labor's Last Angry Man*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1982.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Greenstone, J. David. *Labor in American Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Griffith, Barbara S. *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

Hale, John F. "The Making of the New Democrats." *Political Science Quarterly* 110 (1995): 207-32.

Harrington, Michael. *The Long Distance Runner: An Autobiography*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988.

———. *Toward a Democratic Left: A Radical Program for a New Majority*. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Hartman, Andrew. *The War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Holtzman, Abraham. "Party Responsibility and Loyalty: New Rules in the Democratic Party." *The Journal of Politics* 22 (1960): 485-501.

Humphrey, Hubert. "Planning Economic Policy." *Challenge* 18 (1975): 21-7.

Huntington, Samuel. "The United States." In *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. New York: New York University Press, 1975.

Inglehardt, Ronald. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Initiative Committee for Economic Planning. "For a National Economic Planning System." *Challenge* 18 (1975): 51-3.

Isserman, Maurice. *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington*. New York: Public Affairs, 2000.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Jessop, Bob. *Putting the Capitalist State in Its Place*. London: Polity, 1990.

Judis, John B., and Ruy Teixeria. *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. New York: Scribner, 2002.

Kamarck, Elaine C. *Primary Politics: How Presidential Candidates Have Shaped the Modern Nominating System*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009.

Karol, David. *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Katznelson, Ira. "Considerations on Social Democracy in the United States." *Comparative Politics* 11 (1978): 77-99.

———. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

Katznelson, Ira, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder. "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950." *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (1993): 283-306.

Key, V.O. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984 [1949].

Keyssar, Alexander. *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

Kirkpatrick, Jeane. *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1978.

———. *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics*. New York: Russell Sage, 1976.

Klinkner, Philip A. *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Kousser, J. Morgan. *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Lassiter, Matthew D. *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Leuchtenburg, William E. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009 [1963].

———. *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon*

B. Johnson. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

Levy, Peter B. *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

Lewis, Penny. *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.

Lichtenstein, Nelson. *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor.* New York: Basic Books, 1995.

———. *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Lieberman, Robert C. *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Logan, John R. and Harvey L. Molotch. *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007 [1987].

Loss, Christopher P. *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

MacLean, Nancy. *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace*. New York: Russell Sage, 2006.

Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen. *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*. New York: The Free Press, 1989.

Masket, Seth E. *No Middle Ground: How Informal Party Organizations Control Nominations and Polarize Legislatures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

Mayer, William G. "Superdelegates: Reforming the Reforms Revisited." In *Reforming the Presidential Nomination Process*, edited by Steven S. Smith and Melanie J. Springer, 85-108. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009.

Mayhew, David R. *Placing Parties in American Politics: Organization, Electoral Settings, and Government Activity in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

McAdam, Doug. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1982].

McGarr, Kathryn J. *The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, 2011.

McGovern, George S. *Grassroots: The Autobiography of George McGovern*. New York: Random House, 1977.

Medvic, Stephen. "Old Democrats in New Clothing? An Ideological Analysis of a Democratic Party Faction." *Party Politics* 13 (2007): 587-609.

Mettler, Suzanne. *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Michels, Robert. *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: The Free Press, 1962.

Mickey, Robert. *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Miller, Arthur H., Warren E. Miller, Alden S. Raine, and Thad A. Brown. "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election." *American Political Science Review* 70 (1976): 753-78.

Miller, James. *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Mills, C. Wright. "Letter to the New Left." *New Left Review* I/5 (1960): 18-23.

Mills, Kay. *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. New York: Plume, 1993.

Miroff, Bruce. *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2007.

———. "Movement Activists and Partisan Insurgents." *Studies in American Political Development* 21 (2007): 92-109.

Mollenkopf, John H. *The Contested City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Mondale, Walter F. *The Accountability of Power: Toward a Responsible Presidency*. New York: David McKay, 1975.

Moschonas, Gerassimos. *In the Name of Social Democracy: The Great Transformation, 1945 to the Present*. London: Verso, 2002.

Mucciaroni, Gary. *The Political Failure of Employment Policy, 1945-1982*. Pittsburgh:

University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990.

Mudge, Stephanie L., and Anthony S. Chen. "Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014): 305-30.

Murphy, Thomas P. *The New Politics Congress*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1974.

Nakamura, Robert T. and Denis Sullivan. "Neoconservatism and Presidential Nomination Reforms." *Congress & the Presidency* 9 (1982): 79-97.

O'Brien, Lawrence. *No Final Victories: A Life in Politics from John F. Kennedy to Watergate*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975.

Offe, Claus. "Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics: Social Movements Since the 1960s." In *Challenging Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe*, edited by Charles Maier. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Orren, Karen, and Stephen Skowronek. "Regimes and Regime Building in American Government: A Review of the Literature on the 1940s." *Political Science Quarterly* 113 (1998-1999): 689-702.

———. *The Search for American Political Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Palermo, Joseph A. *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Panitch, Leo. *Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy: The Labour Party, the Trade Unions and Incomes Policy, 1945-1974*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

———. *Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State*. London: Verso, 1986.

Panitch, Leo, and Colin Leys. *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour*. London: Verso, 2001.

Parmet, Herbet S. *The Democrats: The Years After FDR*. New York: Macmillan, 1976.

Parrish, Michael E. *Citizen Rauh: An American Liberal's Life in Law and Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.

Pateman, Carole. *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Patterson, James T. *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967.

Perlstein, Rick. *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. New York: Scribner, 2008.

Perry, James. *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1968.

Pierson, Paul. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Pilon, Dennis. *Wrestling With Democracy: Voting Systems as Politics in the Twentieth-Century West*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Piven, Frances Fox. "Structural Constraints and Political Development: The Case of the American Democratic Party." In *Labor Parties in Postindustrial Societies*, edited by Frances Fox Piven, 235-64. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Piven, Frances Fox, and Richard A. Cloward. *Why Americans Still Don't Vote and Why Politicians Want It That Way*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

Plotke, David. *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

———. "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal in the United States, 1968-1972." *Studies in American Political Development* 10 (1996): 223-88.

Polsby, Nelson. *Consequences of Party Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

———. "The News Media as an Alternative to Party in the Presidential Selection Process." In *Political Parties in the Eighties*, edited by Robert A. Goodwin, 50-66. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1980.

Polsby, Nelson W., and Aaron Wildavsky. *Presidential Elections: Strategies and Structures of American Politics*. New York: Scribner, 1976.

Polsky, Andrew J. "Partisan Regimes in American Politics." *Polity* 44 (2012): 1-30.

———. "The Political Economy of Partisan Regimes: Lessons from Two Republican Eras." *Polity* 35 (2003): 595-612.

———. "Why Regimes? Ideas, Incentives, and Policies in American Political Orders." *Polity* 29 (1997): 625-40.

Pomper, Gerald. *Nominating the President: The Politics of Convention Choice*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963.

Price, David E. *Bringing Back the Parties*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984.

Przeworski, Adam. "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies." *Politics and Society* 7 (1977): 343-401.

Quadragno, Jill. *The Color of Welfare: Hos Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Radosh, Ronald. *Divided They Fell: The Demise of the Democratic Party, 1964-1996*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.

Rae, Nicol. "Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 169-91.

Ranney, Austin. *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.

Rapoport, Ronald D., Alan I. Abramowitz, and John McGlennon. *The Life of the Parties: Activists in Presidential Elections*. Lexington: The University Press of Kansas, 1986.

Rising, George. *Clean for Gene: Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential Campaign*. Westport: Praeger, 1997.

Rosenfeld, Sam. "A Choice, Not an Echo: Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System." PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014.

Rueschemeyer, Dietrich. "Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?" In *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, edited by James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, 305-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Salisbury, Robert. "Urban Politics: The New Convergence of Power." *The Journal of Politics* 26 (1964): 775-97.

Sandbrook, Dominick. *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar Liberalism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

Sartori, Giovanni. "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology." *Government*

and Opposition 4 (1969): 195-214.

Sassoon, Donald. *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*. London: I.B. Taurus, 1996.

Savage, Sean J. *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

———. "To Purge or Not to Purge: Hamlet Harry and the Dixiecrats, 1948-1952." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27 (1997): 773-90.

Scammon, Richard M., and Ben J. Wattenberg. *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1970.

Schantz, Harvey L. and Richard H. Schmidt. "The Evolution of Humphrey-Hawkins." *Journal of Policy Studies* 8 (1979): 368-77.

Schattschneider, E.E. *Party Government*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004 [1942].

Schickler, Eric. *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932-1965*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Schlesinger, Arthur Jr. *Robert Kennedy and His Times*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.

———. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949.

Schlesinger, Stephen. *The New Reformers: Forces for Change in American Politics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.

Schlozman, Daniel. *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Schmidt, John R., and Wayne W. Whalen. "Credentials Contests at the 1968 – and 1972 – Democratic National Conventions." *Harvard Law Review* 82 (1969): 1438-70.

Schulman, Bruce J. *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 [1942].

Shafer, Byron E. *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics*. New York: Russell Sage, 1983.

Shapiro, Ian. "Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or; What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do About It." In *Problems and Method in the Study of Politics*, edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, 19-41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Shefter, Martin. *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Sitkoff, Harvard. "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners." In *The New Deal and the South: Essays*, edited by James Charles Cobb and Michael V. Namorato. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984.

———. *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

———. *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.

Smith, J. Douglas. *On Democracy's Doorstep: The Inside Story on How the Supreme Court Brought "One Person, One Vote" to the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2014.

Solberg, Carl. *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1984.

Soule, John W., and Wilma E. McGrath. "A Comparative Study of Presidential Nominating Conventions: The Democrats 1968 and 1972." *American Journal of Political Science* 19 (1975): 501-17.

Stanley, Timothy. "Going Beyond the New Deal: Socialists and the Democratic Party in the 1970s." In *Making Sense of American Liberalism*, edited by Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley, 62-89. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

———. *Kennedy vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul*. Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2010.

Stein, Judith. *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Trades Factories for Finance in the Seventies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Stone, Clarence. *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989.

Sugrue, Thomas J. "All Politics Is Local: The Persistence of Localism in Twentieth-Century America." In *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*, edited by Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer, 301-26. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

———. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Sullivan, Denis G., Jeffrey L. Pressman, Benjamin I. Page, and John J. Lyons. *The Politics of Representation: The Democratic Convention 1972*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974.

Sullivan, Denis G., Jeffrey L. Pressman, and F. Christopher Arterton. *Explorations in Convention Decision Making: The Democratic Party in the 1970s*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1976.

Sullivan, Patricia. *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Trounstine, Jessica. *Political Monopolies in American Cities: The Rise and Fall of Bosses and Reformers*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Vaïsse, Justin. *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2010.

Vogel, David. *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1989.

Voss, Kim. *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Walz, Jeffrey S. and John Comer. "State Responses to National Democratic Party Reform." *Political Research Quarterly* 52 (1999): 189- 208.

Ware, Alan. *The American Direct Primary: Party Institutionalization and Transformation in the North*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

———. *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940-1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

———. *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1977-1962*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Waterhouse, Benjamin C. *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Wattenberg, Ben J. *Fighting Words: A Tale of How Liberals Created Neo-Conservatism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.

Weil, Gordon. *The Long Shot: George McGovern Runs for President*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1973.

Weir, Margaret. "'Beyond the Plant Gates': Postwar Labor and the Organizational Substructure of Liberalism." Institute for Research on Labor and Employment Worker Paper 194-09, October 2009, http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/workingpapers/194-09.pdf.

———. *Politics and Jobs: The Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

———. "States, Race, and the Decline of New Deal Liberalism." *Studies in American Political Development* 19 (2005): 157-72.

Weiss, Nancy J. *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Wells, Tom. *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Westwood, Jean. *Madame Chair: The Political Autobiography of an Unintentional Pioneer*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007.

Wetherly, Paul, Clyde W. Barrow, and Peter Burnham, eds. *Class Power and the State in Capitalist Society: Essay on Ralph Miliband*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

White, Theodore H. *The Making of the President 1964*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1965.

———. *The Making of the President 1968*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969.

———. *The Making of the President 1972*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1973.

Wilson, James Q. *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Wolfe, Alan. *America's Impasse: The Rise and Fall of the Politics of Growth*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.

Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1955].

Zelizer, Julian E. *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Zieger, Robert H. *The CIO, 1935-1955*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995.