

Comparative Analysis of Successful Third Parties

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Abstract

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This thesis explores how the Republican Party (US) and the Labour Party (UK) were successful in becoming the rare examples of third parties that displaced a major party to become one of the major parties in a two-party system. In exploring this question the thesis first examines the political science ‘rules of the game’ that make it extremely difficult for third parties, followed by a historical/sociological comparative analysis of case studies of the Republican and Labour Parties to determine if there are similarities in their rise to power. The comparative analysis shows that under extreme conditions, a fundamental sociological and demographic change may occur which supports the addressing of issues that the major parties will be unable to adequately incorporate for fear of upsetting their core base supporters. It is under this context that a third party could ultimately be successful in rising to major party status.

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Introduction

As electoral results continued to roll in for the contentious 2000 presidential election, one of the presidential candidates took the opportunity to reflect upon the close nature of the results. “By the way, I do think Gore cost me the election, especially in Florida”.¹ These comments by Green Party candidate Ralph Nader in the wake of the contentious 2000 election; mirror some of the interest and blame placed upon his third party presidential campaign that arguably resulted in the election of George W. Bush in one of the closest elections in American history. This contemporary example helps to highlight the complex and heavily debated role third parties play in American politics as well as exemplifying the arguable weakening of America’s two-party political system.

Media pundits and academics point to the development of third party candidates like Nader and the Green Party as well as the Tea Party movement as growing signs of the erosion of public support for the current two-party system. They further their contentions by highlighting recent polling that shows a decline in party affiliation to both the Democratic and Republican parties and conversely an increase in the number of registered “independents” as further evidence of an apparent disenfranchisement with the status quo of the American political system.²

While these contemporary arguments offer an opportunity for speculative debate, they are far from unique. Academics and journalists have been discussing the impending collapse of the two-party system for well over a century in the United States. In the late nineteenth century there was growing talk of the Populists (People’s Party) joining with

¹ David J. Green. *Third-Parties Matter: Politics, Presidents, and Third Parties in American History* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 117.

² Gallup.com. “Congress begins 2013 with 14% Approval”. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159812/congress-begins-2013-approval.aspx> (accessed Aug. August 23, 2013).

and potentially displacing the Democratic Party as one of the two major parties in the country. In the early twentieth century there was discussion of the threat imposed by the efforts of Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressives to the Democratic and Republican Parties' duopoly. And as the nation hovered on the cusp of a new century Ross Perot and the Reform Party drew considerable attention toward the viability of third parties and to the perceived breakdown of public support for the current two-party system.

While these examples are interesting side notes in political history, they all failed to displace one of the two major parties. The continuous failure of third parties draws attention to an interesting question. How much is there really any likelihood of a true third party emerging that would successfully challenge one of the two major parties? The usual political science approach to answering this question is to look at the way the 'rules of the game' lead to the lack of third party success.

This paper will draw upon political science scholarship to examine the contemporary limitations placed on third parties. However, I look to add to the conversation regarding third party viability with an interdisciplinary examination of the key historical/sociological factors that contributed to the rare instances of third parties being successful in challenging and subsequently displacing one of the two major parties in a two-party system. More specifically this thesis will develop a comparative analysis of two case studies, the rise of the Republican Party in the United States and the rise of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, to determine how these third parties were successful in displacing one of the major parties in a two party dominated political system. Looking at these historical examples in close detail will offer a clearer sense of just how difficult it is for a third party to emerge in the context of two party dominated

electoral institutions such as those in the U.S. and U.K. At the same time, this thesis will move beyond the usual institutional discussion to see how such transformations only take place in the context of very fundamental disruptions to the existing social order. These examples will highlight the difference between the bubbling up of movements like the Greens or the Tea Party and an actual shift in the two-party order which would require a more profound underlying social transformation.

The Republican Party was selected for the case study from the United States because it represents the only time a third party successfully displaced one of the two major parties since the development of mass parties during the Jacksonian era of the early nineteenth century. The Labour Party of the United Kingdom was selected as the second case study for this comparative analysis because the Republican Party is the only example of the successful rise to major party status of an American third party; and while based in a parliamentary rather than a presidential form of governance, the Labour Party is a useful case study because it emerged in the context of a two-party dominated system in a country with sociological and historical similarities comparable to the United States. Moreover, even though Britain has active third parties within its parliamentary system, its government has historically been dominated by two major parties.

I contend that there are analytical connections to be made between the Republican and Labour Parties' displacement of one of the two major parties of its respective country's two-party system, and that it was the inability of the major parties to address a growing ideological/social challenge to the existing social order that facilitated the success of these third parties. These contentious issues were so disruptive to the political

landscape of these two countries that I argue they eventually led to the fall of the Whigs (U.S.) and Liberals (U.K.) and the rise of the Republican and Labour Parties.

This study will show that the rarity of successful third parties and the sheer amount of social upheaval required to allow for the displacement of a major party highlights that it is very unlikely a third party will be successful in the contemporary United States or in similar polities like the United Kingdom. Despite the continued polarization in American and British politics, the historical evidence indicates that most strains will be resolved within the existing two-party system and only under unusual conditions will this system fail to integrate upheaval within its ranks. The recent growth in power of the Liberal Democrats in the U.K. offers a tantalizing contemporary example of a rising third party. However, because their new found political position as a junior party is tied to their coalition government with the Conservatives, the U.K. two-party system has thus far been successful in avoiding the displacement of one of its two major parties by a third party challenger.

This thesis and its comparative analysis of the Republican and Labour Parties and their rise to major party status is structured into four chapters in addition to this introduction. Chapter One undertakes a review of the leading political science discussion on the constraints facing third parties, focusing on the institutional design of these two countries' governments that encourages a two-party system. Chapter Two will continue with a case study of the Republican Party followed by a case study of the Labour Party in Chapter Three. The results from these two case studies will be compared in Chapter Four to determine if there are similarities in historical/sociological factors that contributed to the Republicans and Labour Parties being able to succeed in displaced one of the two

dominate parties of its era. Chapter Four will conclude the analysis by returning to a brief discussion of how this historical analysis might inform contemporary discussions of third party politics and possible third party future opportunities to displace one of the current dominate parties in America's and the United Kingdom's two-party political systems.

Chapter 1: Political Science Perspective on Third Party Limitations:

Third parties have been active players throughout American and British political history; yet, the general consensus amongst political scientists is that it is extremely difficult for a third party to be successful in breaking through a two party hegemony like that found in the United States and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, while political scientists offer a diverse range of explanations for why third parties are rarely successful, I contend the key limitations can be organized into three main categories: institutional barriers, sociological handicaps, and major party strategy. An examination of these factors will help to frame my later sociological/historical comparative analysis of the ability of the Republican and Labour Parties to displace one of the major parties in a two-party system. This chapter will first look at how these barriers, handicaps, and major party strategies limit the success of third parties in the United States before closing with how similar factors influence third parties in Great Britain.

United States:

A. Institutional Barriers

The first of these constraints and perhaps one of the most difficult for a third party to overcome is the institutional barriers which come in the form of constitutional biases, primaries, ballot access restrictions, and presidential debates. These institutional barriers, which are constitutional laws or electoral rules established by the two major parties, set a challenging series of hurdles for third parties to overcome in their bid to challenge the two major parties' dominance in America politics.

1. Constitutional Biases:

When the framers of the United States Constitution established their new republic they chose to base it on a system where political representation at both the state and federal levels would be won by the candidates who received a plurality of the electoral vote. Over time these winner-take-all elections have resulted in a political structure that supports a two-party system. In what came to be termed ‘Duverger’s Law’ Maurice Duverger hypothesized that simple-majority single-ballot elections favor the development of two-party systems. As he states, “An almost complete correlation is observable between the simple-majority single-ballot system and the two-party system: dualist countries use the simple-majority vote and simple-majority vote countries are dualist.”³ Duverger points out that in the United States it was the lack of second or further polling that led to the “emergence and the maintenance of the two party system.”⁴ It is this relationship between popularly elected single-member-district representatives in conjuncture with a history of dualism or competitive alternative political schools of thought that Duverger contends resulted in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom having predominately two-party political systems.

Duverger’s findings of a casual relationship between simply majority voting and two-party systems as a result of plurality voting structured within single-member-districts is further supported by the research of Douglas W. Rae. In a study of 107 nations, Rae found that countries employing Duverger’s model of plurality voting in conjuncture with single member representative districts tended to have two-party systems while those that used other forms of elections overwhelmingly had multi-party systems.

³ Maurice Duverger. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1954), 217.

⁴ Duverger, 218.

It is this relationship between plurality voting and two-party systems that Rae terms the plurality formula that is a key factor in the development and continuation of two-party systems.⁵

This tendency of countries with plurality voting to have two major parties is further highlighted by contrasting it with countries that employ proportional representation. In the United States political parties compete for an individual seat in the Senate or House of Representatives and the candidate that wins the most votes wins the election. In contrast to America's single-member district system, countries like Spain which employ proportional representation as a means of electing their governmental representatives reward the parties that achieve a minimal level of success with legislative seats proportional to the percentage of the votes they won in the election. This results in the creation of multiple parties which allows the various minor parties to appeal to special interest groups. Conversely, the single-member district system rewards only those who win individual elections, which Shattschneider contends becomes a powerful incentive for encouraging the development of two major parties in America politics. As he states "it is clear that the operation of the system is to exaggerate the victory of the strongest party and to discriminate radically against lesser parties. The system discriminates moderately against the second party but against third, fourth, and fifth parties the force of this tendency is multiplied to the point of extinguishing their chances of winning seats altogether."⁶

⁵ Douglas W. Rae, W. *The Political Consequences of Electoral Law*. (London: Yale University Press, 1967), 93-94.

⁶ E.E. Schattschneider. *Party Government*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston), 69-75.

In sum, the U.S. Constitution is highly biased toward a two party system making it extremely difficult for a third party candidate to be successful in winning the presidency of the United States.

2. Primaries:

The second key Institutional Barrier that is emphasized by political scientists for limiting third party viability is the impact of the primary system. These primaries, which are party elections that narrow the field of candidates, allows the electorate to have a voice in the nomination process for the candidate who will represent either the Democratic or Republican Parties in state or Congressional elections. The impact of this Progressive Era reform on the major party candidate selection process and consequently the viability of third parties is that it has resulted in the channeling of political activism into the two major parties. Rather than going through the difficult and often futile process of forming an alternative party, insurgents can work within the major parties to win an election. As Bibby and Maisel state “this ‘burrowing from within’ strategy is much more likely to yield success than the third party or independent candidacy method. This direct primary makes American parties particularly porous and susceptible to internal influences and in the process reduces the incentives to create additional parties.”⁷ These primaries play a significant role in hampering the efforts of third parties to gain a foothold in the American political system.

Additionally, just as state and congressional primaries weaken the prospects for third parties, the presidential primary system furthers the funneling of insurgent

⁷ John Bibby and Sandy L. Maisel. *Two Parties or More? The American Party System*. (Boulder: HarperCollins Publishers), 58.

candidates and their supporters into working within the Republican and Democratic Parties. Dissident presidential candidates out of step with the major party establishment have historically been forced to seek an alternative route to the presidency through third parties. This began to change in the wake of contentious 1968 Democratic Party Convention when the major parties moved toward much greater usage of presidential primaries and open caucuses in the nominating process of their candidates. This transfer of the control of the nomination process out of the hands of party elite to the primary voters has made it more applicable for insurgents to use the primary system to achieve their goals rather than opting for the more difficult option of creating or running under the banner of a third party. As Epstein states, “the reason is that third party efforts are discouraged by the opportunity to capture the party label of one or the other major party in the primary”.⁸

A final consequence of the direct primary system is the effect of primary laws on prospective voters and the legal institutionalization of the two major party labels. Some states require that before being allowed to vote in a primary, a voter must declare their party preference. In Alabama, voters must sign a poll list declaring their party preference before they are allowed to vote in their state’s primaries.⁹ The result of this declaration is that voters becoming conditioned to see themselves as being aligned with either major party and also to reinforce the dominance of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the American two-party system.¹⁰ To what extent these primary registration laws have an

⁸ Leon Epstein. *Political Parties in the American Mold*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 131.

⁹ “Code of Alabama- Title 17: Elections- Section 17-13-7.” *law.onecle.com*
<http://law.onecle.com/alabama/elections/17-13-7.html> (Accessed August 19, 2013).

¹⁰ Epstein, 245.

effect on the electoral process is debatable; however, to some degree these laws further hamper the viability of third parties in an already contentious political environment.

Overall, primaries offer the voters a more inclusive role in the selection process of the candidates that will represent the major parties in state and national elections. While party candidate elections have resulted in a more open electoral process, these primaries act as an institutional barrier against third parties being successful in the United States. By way of either channeling dissenting voices to work within the two major party structure or reinforcing party allegiances, the long term effect of these direct primaries is that third parties have to fight an uphill battle in the American electoral process.

3. Ballot Access Restrictions:

The third major institutional barrier against third party electoral success is the effect of ‘ballot access restrictions’. Before the move to the Australian ballot in the 1890’s, U.S. political parties distributed their own unofficial election ballots or “party strips” which were made available at polling stations on Election Day. Voters would select one of these ballots to be placed in an election box which often resulted in a straight ticket vote for that particular party. This form of voting changed in the U.S. with the adoption of the Australian ballot and the creation of a single official ballot. While the new ballot laws potentially benefited third parties by allowing voters the ability to vote privately without being judged for their vote selection, these new laws also placed the authority to regulate the access to this ballot in the hands of elected officials.¹¹

¹¹ Jerrold G. Rusk. “The Effects of the Australian Ballot on Split Ticket Voting: 1876-1908.” *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (1970): 1220-1221. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1958367>.

Over time electoral officials representing both the Democrats and Republicans crafted election laws that required third parties to file a petition in order to be placed on the ballot for each election while the two major parties received automatic placement. While each state has varying levels of petition signature requirements to appear on the ballot, political scientists contend this process is an important institutional barrier to third party viability. For example, Steven Rosenstone et al. highlights that prospective third parties in states like Montana and Oklahoma have to gain the petition signatures of at least five percent of the state's population in order to appear on their state's ballot.¹² Additionally, to appear on the ballot of all fifty states ballots plus Washington D.C. it is estimated that a third party presidential candidate in 2008 needed at least 690,000 signatures.¹³

To this seemingly high signature requirement is the extra burden of a short time frame for the collection of these petition signatures. As the Rosenstone et al state, "This lack of a uniform petition period or filing deadline means that a third party or independent candidate cannot mount a nationwide effort, instead, he must hold fifty-one different drives at different times during the election."¹⁴ It is this small window of opportunity to gather varying amounts of signature petitions at various times in different states that adds another institutional barrier in the way of third parties in America.

Finally, in addition to high signature requirements in conjuncture with a short window for gathering these signatures is the third ballot restriction burden of the funding needed to get on the state ballots. In 1980 third party candidate John Anderson had to

¹² Rosenstone et al. *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 21.

¹³ Barry C. Burden. "Ballot Regulations and Multiparty Politics in the States." *Political Science and Politics* 40, no. 4 (Oct., 2007), 669. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452047>.

¹⁴ Rosenstone et al, 21.

spend nearly half of his campaign budget in order to get on the ballot of every state.¹⁵

For state and congressional seats, many states require filing fees for minor parties.

Richard Winger found that in states that had filing fees of at least 1 percent of the salary of a political office sought, there have been no minor party victories.¹⁶

Combined, these ballot access restrictions of minimal petition signature requirements, time limits, and petition gathering and filing expenditures appear to make it challenging for third parties to get on many state ballots and have created an institutionally supported electoral duopoly in America.

4. Presidential Debates:

The final major institutional barrier that limits the ability of third parties to be successful at the highest level of America's two-party system is the impact of presidential debates. With televised presidential debates acting as a vital source for candidates to gain media exposure and legitimacy, third party candidates often find themselves being blocked from attendance by the major parties. Control over who will take part in these debates is controlled by the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates, which is co-chaired by representatives from both the Democratic and Republican Parties. The net result of this control of which parties can attend presidential debates has resulted in third parties rarely being able to attend and benefit from the media exposure offered by these debates.

¹⁵ Lewis-Beck, Michael and Peverill Squire. "The Politics of Institutional Choice: Presidential Ballot Access for Third Parties in the United States." *British Journal of Political Science* 25, No. 3 (1995), 419. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/194262>.

¹⁶ Richard Winger. "Institutional Obstacles to a Multi-Party System." *Multiparty Politics in America*. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, Inc., 1997): 169.

The exclusionary efforts of the major parties can be seen in the 1996 presidential campaign of the Reform Party candidate Ross Perot. While Perot was allowed to take part in the 1992 presidential debates the Commission on Presidential Debates chose to bar Perot from taking part in the debates in 1996. The bipartisan commission defended the exclusion of Perot by contending that Perot did not meet the commission's criteria of having a realistic chance of winning the election. The Perot campaign challenged the legality of this decision in the courts but a federal district court upheld the right of the commission to decide who will participate in presidential elections. Lacking the opportunity to benefit from the media exposure offered by the presidential debates Perot like many third party candidates before and after him was pushed to the political fringes which ultimately culminated in a decisive electoral defeat in the presidential election.¹⁷

B. Sociological Handicaps

The second major category of political science discourse pertaining to the leading factors related to the lack of third party success in elections is the impact of sociological handicaps. While they may seem less firmly entrenched than institutional factors, these handicaps can arguable be seen as playing a significant role in the lack of third party victories in American elections.

1. Public Image of Third Parties:

The first sociological handicap highlighted by political scientists for the weak electoral performance of third parties is their poor public perception amongst the electorate. Before voting, prospective voters will often size up the political experience

¹⁷ Rosenstone et al, 261-263.

and credentials of the presidential and congressional candidates. Due to the combined impact of the previously discussed institutional barriers in tandem with the additional difficulties of organizing and obtaining campaign resources, third parties have a difficult time attracting experienced candidates. As Steven Rosenstone et al point out “well-known, prestigious candidates know that a third party effort will be hopeless and can end their careers. Only extraordinary circumstances will push established politicians (and voters) into a third party camp.”¹⁸ This process results in third parties having to put forward less qualified nominees that result in a poor public perception of the party that in turn results in a low voter turnout for the party on Election Day.

Moreover, this poor public perception is reinforced by the lack of media coverage given to third parties. As modern campaigns became increasingly dependent on the media to provide name recognition and legitimacy for the candidates, third parties find themselves at a significant disadvantage compared to the Democratic and Republican Parties. Since third party candidates generally lack the financial infrastructure available to the major parties, media coverage rather than political advertisements act as one of the key components for connecting with voters.¹⁹

This dependency upon the media to reach out to the electorate is undermined by a media bias against third party candidates. Two categories of media bias, gatekeeping bias and coverage bias put forward by David D’Alessio and Mike Allen in their meta-analysis of media bias in partisan elections helps to offer a context from which to examine the perceived bias against third parties in American elections. Gatekeeping bias is often an ideological based editorial selectivity on what stories to cover while coverage

¹⁸ Ibid, 37-38.

¹⁹ Ibid, 33-37.

bias is a bias to provide more coverage to a particular candidate(s) over others.²⁰

Together these two forms of media bias can potentially have a detrimental effect on third party candidates.

This media bias against third parties can be exemplified with the presidential campaign of John Anderson in 1980. Even though early in the run up to the election Anderson was polling in a close third in many states, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter were still receiving an overwhelming majority of the press coverage. As Rosenstone et al. state, “In 1980 the leading newspapers and weekly magazines gave Regan and Carter about ten times more coverage than all eleven third parties and independent candidates combined.” They continue by stating that, “This disparity showed up in network television news as well: Between January and September the CBS Evening News devoted 6 hours, 10 minutes of coverage to Carter, 3 hours, 9 minutes to Reagan, and 1 hour, 46 minutes to Anderson.”²¹ While it is difficult to measure the effect of this coverage bias upon Anderson’s independent campaign this lack of media coverage undermined one this third party candidates main tools for winning over the hearts and minds of the voting public.

In addition to suffering from coverage bias by the media, John Anderson’s presidential bid was hampered by the effects of gatekeeper bias. Anderson received little coverage because publishers and broadcasters though his campaign did not merit

²⁰ David D’Alessio and Mike Allen. “Media Bias in Presidential Elections: A Meta-Analysis.” *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 4 (Sept., 2000): 135-136.

<http://jonathanstray.com/papers/Media%20Bias%20in%20Presidential%20Elections.pdf>

²¹ Rosenstone et al., 33.

consideration. Gatekeeper bias was demonstrated by newspaper editors who two out of three thought their audience had little if no interest in third party candidates.²²

Together these forms of media bias underscore the imbalance of media coverage that third parties receive. For cash strapped third parties that are heavily reliant upon the media to offer their policy ideas to the voter this media bias can severely undermine the electoral viability of these alternative parties.

The final sociological handicap and potentially one of the most damaging to a third party's chances of winning an election is the impact of voters' psychological vote selection process. While a prospective voter may wish to vote for a third party candidate they will more often than not place a "strategic" vote for one of the nominees of the two major parties that most aligns with their political perspective rather for a third party candidate that is perceived as having little chance of winning the election. William Riker defines this strategic voting as "voting contrary to one's immediate taste in order to obtain an advantage in the long run."²³ It is this strategic voting or secondary "psychological" voting aspect of Duverger's Law of simple-majority single-ballot systems previous discussed in the constitutional barriers of this chapter that further reinforces, "the emergence and maintenance of the two-party system."²⁴ This strategic voting reinforced the dominance of the two major parties in a two party system leaving third parties to suffer a perpetual losing battle at the fringes of the electoral system. The impact of this strategic voting on the viability of third parties will be further explored in the third key category major party strategies for why political scientists contend third parties are not success in American elections.

²² Ibid, 35.

²³ William H. Riker. *The Art of Political Manipulation*. (London: Yale University Press: 1986): 78.

²⁴ Duverger, 218.

C. Major Party Strategies:

The final major category of political science discourse I discovered in relation to why third parties rarely win elections is the impact of major party strategies.

1. Delegitimization Tactics:

The first tactic used by the Democratic and Republican Parties to weaken the ability of third parties to be electorally successful is to play upon the tendency of voters to vote strategically in a two-party political system. While a voter might claim to be an independent or be supportive of a third party candidate they often will vote for a major party candidate that is closer to them ideologically rather than waste their vote on a candidate with little chance of winning. It is these “tactical voters” that Stephen Fisher defines as voters who employ “short term instrumentally rational and those for whom it is utility-maximizing to vote for a party other than the preferred party” which leads voters not to vote for their original party selection.²⁵ Adept politicians have learned to manipulate this voting behavior to convince voters that a vote for a third party would simply be wasted. As John Aldrich states, “Strategic politicians inform voters of the wasted-vote argument and convince at least some voters that it is sensible to act as ‘strategic voters’.”²⁶

The example of the John Anderson presidential election bid highlights this tactical decision of politicians to play upon voter’s fears of wasting their vote. In the 1980

²⁵ Stephen D. Fisher. “Definition and Measurement of Tactical Voting: The Role of Rational Choice.” *British Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 1 (Jan., 2004): 153.

²⁶ John H. Aldrich. “Rational Choice and Turnout.” *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (Feb., 1993): 270. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2111531>.

presidential election Jimmy Carter stated that “a vote for John Anderson is a vote for Ronald Reagan.” The argument for this contention was that a vote for the independent candidate instead of Carter, who was often the Anderson supporters’ secondary choice, would result in the election of Reagan.²⁷ It is this was wasted vote argument that yet further weakens the position of third party candidates in a two-party political system like the United States.

2. Anti-Fusion and Sour Loser Laws:

The second strategy used by the major parties to limit the success of third parties is the usage of anti-fusion and sour loser laws. Richard Argersinger defines fusion politics as “the electoral support of a single set of candidates by two or more parties.”²⁸

Traditionally in the United States this entailed a temporary alliance between a third parties and the weaker of the two major parties in order to be successful in the upcoming election. The height of the usage of fusion politics was in the late nineteenth century with the predominant amount of political alliances forming between the Democratic Party and third parties in the Midwest and West as the Democrats sought the support of third parties in increasingly close elections.

This ability to fuse with a major party was significantly hindered with the introduction of the Australian ballot. Previous to the introduction of this new ballot process the parties printed and distributed their own straight party tickets which offered ample opportunity to employ cross-filling tickets in contentious elections. The introduction of the Australian ballot allowed the Republicans who controlled many of the

²⁷ Ibid, 260.

²⁸ Peter H. Argersinger. “‘A Place on the Ballot’: Fusion and Antifusion Laws.” *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (April, 1980): 288. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1860557>.

state governments to block these fusion ballot tickets forcing third party and Democratic candidates to run separate tickets splitting the vote with the goal of gaining a Republican victory. Argersinger quotes a Nebraska Supreme Court ruling as stating that this tactical usage of the Australian ballot by the Republicans was a “scheme to put the voters in a straight jacket.”²⁹

Over the next century various states have enacted various forms of anti-fusion laws to prevent third parties and the weaker major party from cross ticketing to defeat the other major party in elections. One of the most severe setbacks to third parties and their usage of fusion elections came in 1997 when the United States Supreme Court upheld states’ rights to prohibit candidates from appears on the ballot on more than one party’s line. The lawsuit was filed by the Twin Cities Area New Party which was blocked from nominating a candidate for the state legislature because that candidate had already accepted the nomination of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. In a 6-3 decision the Supreme Court ruled that the state had the constitutional right to regulate its elections. Speaking for the majority opinion Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist stated that “the Constitution permits the Minnesota Legislature to decide that political stability is best served through a healthy two-party system.”³⁰

These court backed anti-fusion laws play an important role in diminishing the position of third parties in America. Not only do they weaken the ability of third parties to cooperate with a major party to gain more influence and name recognition but these laws further the entrenchment of the two-party system to the detriment of third parties.

²⁹ Ibid, 292.

³⁰ Linda Greenhouse. “Supreme Court Rules against Fusion Tickets by Minor Parties.” *The New York Times*, April 29, 1997.

The second major party strategy used by the Democratic and Republican Parties is the usage of sour loser laws, which prohibit candidates who have lost a primary from running as a third party candidate in that upcoming general election. These statutes in use in many U.S. state elections look to prevent candidates who have lost the candidacy of one of the major parties from running in the election with the potential of dividing the vote. The legality of these sour loser laws were sustained when in 1974 the Supreme Court upheld two sore loser laws in California. The court found that it is the state's general policy "is to have contending forces within the party employ the primary campaign and primary election to finally settle their differences.... [The 'sour loser law] effectuates this aim."³¹ This court decision has made it increasingly difficult for experienced candidates to join a third party during an election cycle further hampering the viability of third parties in American elections.

3. Cooption of Third Party Policies:

The final major party strategy that the two major parties use to undermine third parties in the United States is the cooption of third party policies. This strategy lies at the core of my thesis discussion of why the Republic and Labour Parties were successful, because these were rare instances where the major parties could not adequately address the issues that gave the rise to the new parties because it would alienate their existing supporters. Historically third parties have arisen to address issues seemingly overlooked or under addressed by the two major parties. For example, the Republican Party came into power by confronting the divisive issue of slavery during an era of dramatic

³¹ David E. Price. *Bringing Back the Parties*. (Washington D.C.: The Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1984): 132-133.

demographic change as a result of the market revolution, which both the two major parties of its era looked to placate and minimize as a political issue. While the Republican Party was successful in this instance, the historical record for other third parties that developed around specific issues is far bleaker.

Indeed, at first these third parties can gain momentum by addressing issues overlooked by the two major parties, but soon after the major parties adapt and take up the causes heralded by these fringe parties, often leading subsequently to the demise of that third party. Rosenstone et al highlights this when they state that “Minor parties often advocate policies not embraced by the major parties. Frequently, the major parties respond rationally to this signal that there are disgruntled voters and adopt the third parties’ positions as their own.”³² Richard Hofstadter sums up this short lived life cycle of third parties when he states “when a third party’s demands become popular enough, they are appropriated by one or both of the major parties and the party disappears. Third parties are like bees, once they have stung they die.”³³ Having the main impetus for the creation of their third party pulled out from under them by the cooption of their party platform policies by the major party, these alternative parties quickly flounder and eventually disappear altogether over subsequent election cycles.

The Populists of the late nineteenth century offers a well-documented example of a third party having its policies coopted by a major party which eventually resulted in the demise of the party. The Populists or People’s Party developed early on as a southern agrarian-based movement responding to the negative ramifications of industrialization in America and a perceived apathy by the major parties to the concerns of these farmers. As

³² Rosenstone et al, 43.

³³ Richard Hofstadter. *The Age of Reason*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 97.

the following for this third party grew, party leaders looked to act upon the new found electoral strength of this fledgling party by forming fusion tickets with the Democrats and Republicans in order to achieve electoral victories and to grow legitimacy as a party nationally.

Over time however many of the policies of the People's Party were coopted by the Democratic Party as the Populists struggled to unite under a common party platform after the wide spread usage of fusion politics across the country. In the 1896 presidential campaign Populist presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan ran almost exclusively upon the 'free silver issue' as a cure for the country's economic woes because the wide spread usage of fusion politics had left this topic as one of the few issues most people within the newly enlarged party could agree upon. When the Democratic Party coopted the Populists by taking the free silver issue into their own party platform, the final issue linchpin that held the party together was removed resulting in the rapid collapse of the People's Party and the absorption of its followers into the Democratic Party fold over the next decade.³⁴

As the example of the Populists highlights, third parties often develop around an issue that is under addressed by the major parties, however, the adaptive ability of the Democratic and Republican Parties to coopt third party policies into their own party platform often ends in the collapse of the compromised third party. Lacking the ability to differentiate themselves from the major parties, these fringe groups are quickly absorbed by either major party or attempt to hold out in a hopeless struggle for legitimacy that often ends in the death of the party.

³⁴ Robert C. McMath, Jr. *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 199-203.

The United Kingdom:

While this paper is generally focused on the challenges faced by third parties in the United States, a brief examination of the potential roadblocks faced by British third parties will be helpful in uncovering the overall difficulties third parties face in breaking into a two-party dominated political system. Without going extensively into the political science discourse pertaining to the restraints against third parties in the British political system, an examination of the barriers against third party viability in the U.K. will help to frame the case study in Chapter Three of the rise of the Labour Party. Like the experiences of third parties in America, the major restraints on minor party viability in Britain can be summarized into three key categories: institutional barriers, sociological handicaps, and major party strategies. Whatever the inconsistencies, the challenges facing third parties in Great Britain do offer some interesting similarities in relationship to the political hurdles third parties are confronted with in the United States.

Institutional Barriers:

In the United Kingdom, institutional barriers play an important role in limiting the success of third parties to challenge the dominance of the two major parties. British elections, lacking a codified or formally written constitution like that of the United States, are based on historical and legal precedent to guide the electoral process in the country. The British constitutional monarchy is based on a parliamentary system with three branches of government consisting of a House of Lords, House of Commons, and an essentially figurehead monarch. Of these, the electorate of Britain can only vote on who will represent them in the House of Commons which has over time become the most

powerful branch of government in the country. It is the electoral system established to elect Members of Parliament (MPs) to the House of Commons that represents one of the most restricting institutional barriers against a third party rising to major party status in the U.K.³⁵

The major institutional barriers that limit third parties in British elections to gain a foothold in the Parliament are the winner-take-all aspect of their electoral process in a country with single-member-districts. Like the United States, the country electorally is broken down into constituencies that are similar to the U.S. Congressional districts with residents of a predetermined geographic area being able to elect a representative to represent them in the government, and as of 2005, there are 646 single-member constituencies.³⁶ To be elected, a candidate needs to win a plurality of the vote within a particular constituency in what the British call 'First Past the Post' process.³⁷ And like the United States, it is this correlation between a single-member-district-system and a winner-take-all approach to electing a governmental representative that Duverger's Law hypothesizes will result in a two-party dominated system.³⁸ While minor parties do win seats at the local and national level in the United Kingdom, it is these combinations of the institutional barriers of single-member-districts in conjunction with a winner-take all approach to parliamentary elections that has resulted in the domination of two major parties throughout Britain's modern political era.

³⁵ Philip Norton. *The British Polity, Fifth Edition*. (New York: Longman, 2011), 63-77.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 88.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 85.

³⁸ Duverger, 217.

Sociological Handicap:

The second major area of political science discourse in relation to why third parties rarely rise to major party status in the U.K. is that of the sociological handicap which comes in the form of strategic voting. Sharing similar institutional barriers to the U.S. in the form of a single-member-district system tied to a winner-take-all approach to elections, third parties in Britain suffer from the psychological effect of voters not wanting to waste their vote which reinforces the two party system in their country.³⁹ This strategic voting is amplified in the U.K. due in part because of their parliamentary system. After the elections, the party that wins a simple majority in seats forms the next government which allows the party to appoint government officials, dictate the political course of the country during their hold on parliament, and to select a Prime Minister. This domination of a single party in the House of Commons and the sheer amount of political power the victorious party wields under the British system of governance makes the selection of MPs a decisive factor in shaping the voting process in the country. Under these electoral circumstances and with only one vote, British voters often find themselves voting for one of the major parties as not to waste their vote.⁴⁰

Additionally, this wasted vote sociological handicap against third parties in Britain is further enhanced by the effect of the third party ‘squeeze’ which is the “flow of support to one of the other two major parties when the race is close between those two but not the third.”⁴¹ A study by Duff Spafford of the 1964-1966 elections in the U.K. demonstrated this electoral ‘squeeze’ when the largest third party in the country, the

³⁹ Bruce E. Cain. “Strategic Voting in Britain.” *American Journal of Political Sciences* 22, no. 3 (Sept., 1978): 640. <http://jstor.org/stable/2110465>.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 654.

⁴¹ Ibid, 640-641.

Liberals, increased their share of votes over this period; yet, they were only able to hold their seats in the 1966 election where they had done well in 1964 but lost in the other races where the elections were close between the Labour and Conservative Parties.⁴² It is a result of this strategic voting that third parties are seriously handicapped in British elections.

Major Party Strategy:

The final significant restriction that political scientists highlight for the inability of third parties to be success in the United Kingdom is the impact of major party strategy which is most predominately expressed in the cooption of party platform issues of growing third parties that either of the major parties view as a threat in pulling away potential voters. The British parliamentary system allows for a wide variety of issue based minor parties to gain access to the government, and as of 2011 ten minor parties were seated in the House of Commons.⁴³ In general, the two major parties in Britain make little effort to modify their party platforms in order to address the issues that are advocated by these minor parties in order to gain control of the government; yet, during eras of close national races the two parties will make an attempt to gain the support of these third parties' voters to win these elections. The best historical example of this can be seen with the Liberal Party's attempt at 'New Liberalism' in the lead up to the First World War. The Liberals, in a close race with the Conservatives, attempted to modify their party platform in order to undercut the growing Labour Party by promoting new social programs that might win over some of the newly enfranchised working-class

⁴² Duff Spafford. "Electoral Systems and Voter's Behavior: Comments and a Further Test." *Comparative Politics* 5, (Oct, 1970):129-134. Accessed: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/421357>

⁴³ Philip, 98.

voters. While my case study of the Labour Party will show this strategy would ultimately fail to prevent the rise to major party status of this once minor party, for the short term the Liberal Party did benefit from this cooption approach. It is this cooping of the core political issues of the growing third parties that I argue is one of the decisive reasons third parties will rarely be successful in being anything more than a minor threat to the major parties.

In conclusion, the barriers discussed in this chapter help to highlight just how difficult it is for a third party to be successful, with the institutional rules of the game, sociological handicaps, and major party strategies working against third parties rising to major party status. While some of these barriers may be distinctly modern (such as recent debate restrictions), as a whole they demonstrate the basic realities of American and British politics that have fundamentally limited the viability of third parties. Given these stark realities, we can ask, how than did the few rare instances of successful third parties surmount these barriers in their rise to prominence? To answer this question, we need to move beyond the long-term general obstacles highlighted by political science to a more concrete historical discussion. Specifically, we need to take a look at historical examples of third parties that overcame these barriers to see if such historical developments can clarify what is required for a third party to become one of the dominant parties in a two-party system.

Accordingly, the following case studies and concluding comparative analysis will help to determine how Republican and Labour Parties successful and to see if they share any similarities in transcending these obstacles in their ascendance to major party

standing. The results of this analysis offer the potential for contributing to the study of current and future third parties and their chances of being a viable minor party.

Chapter 2: Case study of the Republican Party

The political science discourse from the previous chapter highlights just how difficult it is for a third party to be successful in displacing one of the major parties in a two-party system, yet, somehow the Republican Party was able to overcome these barriers to become the rare example of a successful third party in American history. Just how did the Republicans achieve this rapid rise to major party status? While academics may emphasize factors like the growth in nativism and changing party dynamics as playing a part in the Republican Party's ascension to power, I contend that the key factor that allowed the Republicans to avoid becoming yet another failed political third party was the impact of the slavery debate upon the nation. It was the inability of the party system of the Whig and Democratic Parties to adequately address the growing sectional divide over slavery that eventually led to the collapse of the Second Party System and the displacement of the Whigs by the Republicans. More specifically, this chapter will argue that while there are many aspects to the causation of the sectional dispute between the North and South over the institution of slavery, it was the economic/social conflict between the northern states and the market-oriented economic revolution and that of the southern slave economy that eventually led to the breakdown of the existing political/social order and to the eventual ascension of the Republican Party.

The key point to take from this impact of the contentious issue of slavery on the America political landscape for the purposes of this thesis is that this suggests that only in conditions of intense social upheaval is a third party likely to be able to displace one of the established parties in a two-party system like that of the United States. Barring such a situation, it is likely that one of the existing parties will find a way to incorporate or even

co-opt the issues that led to the rise of this new third party. However, when the old political order finds itself in turmoil over an increasingly divisive issue, these original parties rooted in that old order may find they cannot easily reconstruct themselves to fully address the matter since to do so would mean alienating part of the existing basis for support in that party. In other words, in the rare instances of a divisive issue challenging the existing political order, there may be no viable long-term way to incorporate a new concern linked to a rising third party because to do so would fundamentally go against a core interest of the established parties.

The impact of such a disruptive issue in this case study of the rise of the Republicans will highlight how an economic/social confrontation between the North and South over the expansion of slavery and the inability of the existing political order to adequately address the issue played the decisive factor in allowing the Republican Party to become the only third party in American history to be successful in displacing one of the existing major parties in a two-party political system.

Slavery: Prologue to Sectional Strife

Even from the inception of the United States Constitution, the debate over slavery proved to have been a contentious issue between northern and southern states. While the institution of slavery played a role in the history of all of the original British colonies, by the time of the Constitutional Convention slavery had gradually been phased out of the northern states and was generally relegated to the agrarian-based southern states.

William Freehling credits this move away from slavery in the North on “the humanitarian zeal of the Revolutionary era, together with the non-slaveholder hatred of slave

competition and universal acknowledgment that the economy did not need slavery.”⁴⁴ It is this growing economic rivalry between Free Labor of the North with Slave Labor of the South that this chapter will highlight as being the key causation of the eventual rise of the Republican Party to major party status. While the level of Northern antagonism toward slavery during the founding era is debatable, in general Americans of this period were willing to allow states to address this issue on their own accord as long as it did not threaten the stability of the Union.⁴⁵

This ambivalence toward how to handle the issue of slavery was demonstrated by the delegates of northern states whose economies were based largely on trade, mercantilism, and family commercial and subsistence farming when they agreed to the addition of the three-fifths clause in order to gain the support of the slave economy-based southern states for the passage of the new constitution. This clause states that:

Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other persons.⁴⁶

This compromise allowed the addition of slaves as 3/5 a person in census counts which would determine political representation of the states in the House of Representatives. Over time as the fledgling nation expanded westward and the northern and southern states become increasingly differentiated in their economic models and corresponding

⁴⁴ William W. Freehling, “The Founding Fathers and Slavery.” *The American Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (Feb., 1972): 88. www.jstor.org.

⁴⁵ Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of the American Politics: 1765-1820* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), 80-81.

⁴⁶ “Constitution of the United States: Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3.” *United States Senate Website*. http://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm#a1_sec2 (accessed Sept. 14, 2012).

social perspectives, this three-fifths clause and the debate over slavery itself would soon challenge the very political structure that held the United States together.

Containment of the Slavery Issue by the Old Political Order

Before delving directly into the events that culminated in the rise to major party status of the Republicans, a brief summary of American politics leading up to the early signs of the collapse of the Second Party System will help to frame the examination of the formative period of the Republican Party. During the First Congress, vote trading and short term alliances were often sufficient to gain the passage of legislation; however, by the Third and Fourth Congresses officeholders had divided themselves into two intersectional alliances with the New England based Federalists facing off against the southern state centered Jeffersonian-Republicans. This era of a political party rivalry between the two parties would later be termed the First Party System, where the pro-national bank and tariffs Federalists held control of the government till 1800, while the Jeffersonian-Republicans, whose slaveholding leadership emphasized issues like individual and state rights, would control the federal government till the early 1820's. The First Party System would come to an end in 1815 during the 'Era of Good Feelings' as a result of the Federalists collapsing as a national party due in part to their being on the wrong side of the War of 1812.⁴⁷

Over the next decade the political landscape of the United States would coalesce into the first mass party system of two major parties, often called the Second Party System, where two parties, the Whig and Democratic Parties, vied for voters' support in

⁴⁷ Aldrich, H. John. *Why Parties? A Second Look*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 70-72.

order to win congressional seats, and to also gain the Presidency. Michael F. Holt in *The Political Crisis of the 1850's* states that the stability of the Second Party system was buttressed by the two-party rivalry between the Democratic and Whig Parties which resulted in the successful containment of the contentious issues of slavery for over twenty years.⁴⁸ This competition between geographically located parties that debated issues like tariffs, banking, and transportation proved for a time to be successful in suppressing antagonistic efforts, like those of the Abolitionists, to press the issue of slavery that could potentially divide the nation.

On the one hand, the Democrats, whose leadership was based largely in the agrarian South, were supportive of President Andrew Jackson's policies opposing a national bank, tariff, and government funded support for the building of canals and railways. The Whigs, on the other hand, whose leaders were centered in the commercial New England states, were able to capitalize upon anti-Andrew Jackson sentiment as they expressed support for tariffs, government funding of rail and canals for commerce, and the creation of a Bank of the United States.⁴⁹ By committing themselves to these rival party economic platforms that allowed for political expression by the electorate, the leaders of the two parties were able to preserve the Union and with it their Second Party System from the polarizing debate over slavery. As Holt states, "As long as this commitment remains strong, people within the states of the two sections would be internally divided politically, and the efforts of agitators to unite them into a Northern phalanx against the South and a Southern phalanx against the North would prove futile."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Michael F. Holt *The Political Crisis of the 1850's* (New York: The University of Virginia, 1978), 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 22-23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

In addition, the two parties were able to sustain their bisectional nature of their parties and with it electoral success with the support of their minor factions in the North and South due to the looseness of the federal system. Both parties gave their candidates room in both sections of the country to modify their message regarding slavery in order to win their local elections, seats in the House, and even the Presidency. The Democratic Party could gain the support of its northern Democrats by downplaying the slavery issue, while the Whigs could gain the votes of its southern Cotton Whigs by taking a more localized pro-slavery stance. It was “the ability of the two parties in the two sections to provide alternatives on the section issue,” that Michael Holt points out “increased public faith in the party political process as the optimal way to influence government policy.”⁵¹ This precarious balancing act in handling the divisive issue of slavery would soon be challenged by the growing divergence between the economic/social systems of the northern and southern states in conjuncture with events occurring in America’s expanding western territories.

However, before moving on to examine how the slavery issue contributed to the collapse of the Second Party System, it is important to take brief note of the Anti-Masonic Party, one of America’s first third parties. This party which lasted roughly from 1826 to 1843 began as a single issue based minor party that claimed that the Freemasons had gained too much power in the government and that they were threatening America’s republican principles. The Anti-Masonic Party was successful in electing William Palmer as governor of Vermont in 1831 and their 1832 presidential candidate William Wirt won Vermont’s seven Electoral College votes and nearly eight percent of the national popular vote. While short lived, the Anti-Masonic Party played an important

⁵¹ Ibid, 30-31.

role in the development of third parties in the United States in that they introduced the concept of party nomination conventions, issue based party platforms, and gave a general blueprint of how a third party could challenge the hegemonic control of the two major parties.⁵²

Growing Conflict between Free Labor and Slave Labor

While the Whigs and Democrats had early success in containing the debate over slavery, events quickly began to expose the weakness of the old political order regarding this difficult issue. By the 1840's and 1850's the situation had grown so antagonistic between the northern and southern states that the Whig Party would implode upon itself and the nation would edge even closer to the outbreak of the Civil War. Why did the Second Party System fail to contain the issue of slavery and how did this result in the ascension of the Republican Party to major party status?

The answer to this question lies both in the impact on the bisectional nature of the major parties and in the divergence of the two economic models between the northern and southern states as the slavery debate exploded onto the national stage. While both parties were vulnerable to the slavery issue, it was the Whigs with their larger minority party faction of pro-slavery Cotton Whigs in the South rather than the Democrats and their smaller faction of northern individual and state rights oriented supporters that was most threatened by the escalating rhetoric over slavery. While their early ideological diversity pertaining to slavery had proven to be a strength of the Whig Party, the polarizing nature of this contentious issue on the bisectional nature of the Whigs proved

⁵² William P. Vaughn. *The Anti-Masonic Party in the United States: 1826-1843*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

to be one of its greatest weaknesses which made them, rather than the Democrats to be the most susceptible to being displaced by a slavery issue based third party like the Republicans.⁵³

While the sectional nature of both parties and their minor factions played an important part in the process, the most decisive factor that eventually led to the rise to major party status of the Republican Party was the growing economic/social divide between northern free labor and southern slave labor and the inability of the existing political order to contain this growing North/South sectional rivalry over incompatible economic models. Eric Foner, in his work *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* highlights this growing economic/social division in the country and the development of a northern “free labor ideology” that was in opposition toward the southern slave labor economy.⁵⁴ The author clarifies his analysis by stating that ‘free labor’ is meant to encompass two different economic situations, with one being an employed laborer and the other a self-enfranchised individual. As Foner states, “the dichotomy between slave and free labor masked the fact that ‘free labor’ itself referred to two distinct economic conditions—the wage laborer seeking employment in the marketplace, and the property—owning small producer enjoying a modicum of economic independence.”⁵⁵ He adds that while these groups differed in their economic status, they shared a common economic relationship in that they understood that they held a voluntary association with their work unlike that of

⁵³ Holt, 5-10.

⁵⁴ Eric Foner. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xi.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

a slave. To free labor northerners, slavery imposed a serious threat to everything they stood for.⁵⁶

This growing self-identification of free northern laborers as being threatened by but ultimately superior to the slave based economy of the South is due in part to the changing economic conditions of the early nineteenth century. Like its European counterparts during the 1820-30's, the United States was experiencing a dramatic change in its economy and with it its workforce as the market based revolution spread across the Western world. While the South continued to rely upon an agrarian based economy of family subsistence farming and large scale plantations that used slave labor, many of the northern states were moving toward 'free' wage laborers working in an increasingly industrial-based economy.⁵⁷ John Ashworth points out that early on in this economic reshaping of the nation, prominent Whig leaders looked to, "create a harmony of interest between labour and capital, between agriculture and industry, between slave and free-labour."⁵⁸ Daniel Webster, a prominent Whig from Massachusetts, encapsulated this emphasize on the preservation of the Union over all else when in 1843 he stated that:

We have a vast country, a variety of climate, and various pursuits. We have agricultural states and we have plantation states. We have manufacturing interests and we have commercial interests. And our business is not to inflame our own passions or others concerning the measures of government for the protection of our particular interest; but let us make the whole a great national, I may say a family, concern.⁵⁹

As desperately as Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and other moderates and conservatives tried to contain the slavery debate and to keep the Union together, it was the success of

⁵⁶ Ibid, xi-xii.

⁵⁷ Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development and Political Conflict, 1620-1877* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 205.

⁵⁸ John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic: Volume 1: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1995): 354-355.

⁵⁹ Daniel Webster and Edward Everett, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1903), 184.

the market revolution in the early stages of the Second Party System and the subsequent weakening of traditional party plank issues that would ultimately result in the old order's downfall. As Charles Post states, "The very success of the market-revolution of the 1820's and 1830's undermined the Second Party System and unleashed the political and ideological polarization that would culminate in the US Civil War."⁶⁰ How did the success of this market-revolution that once reinforced the Second Party System eventually result in the weakening of the Whig vs. Democratic rivalry?

According to Charles Post, the nation's economic boom of the 1840-1850's that came with the market revolution had a twofold effect on the country. On the one hand, the heightened demand for raw cotton resulted in an increased profitability for plantation-slavery in the South. On the other hand, the economic expansion that came from this market revolution resulted in an increased maturation and stabilization of the northern economy.⁶¹ Post sums up this point by quoting John Ashworth as stating, "Together, 'the extraordinary growth of the final antebellum years strengthened each section's commitment to its labour system'."⁶²

In addition to the two sections becoming increasingly dedicated to their labor system, by 1840 the incompatibility of the capitalistic North's and slavery-based South's economic model as the nation was expanding westward proved to be the key catalyst in the collapse of the Second Party System. Charles Post points out, "slavery *required* geographic expansion into new territories", while "US-capitalism's expanding reproduction required the geographic expansion of petty-commodity social-property

⁶⁰ Post, 205.

⁶¹ Post, 211.

⁶² Ashworth, (2007), 478 & Post, 211.

relations in agriculture.”⁶³ Either the newly opened western states’ agricultural economies would be structured around a ‘social-property’ relationship of independent farmers/workers able to trade their goods or services freely in the marketplace or it would be dominated by a ‘social-property’ relationship of plantation-slavery. Put more specifically, by 1840 the conflicting economic models of the free labor capitalist North and the slave-economy South and their inability to coexist in the newly acquired western territories helped to enflame social/economic sectional hostilities that would ultimately result in the breakdown of the old regime’s Second Party System.

Politically, the impact of these economic developments in both the North and South, “greatly reduced the importance of the traditional issues over which the bisectionally organized Democratic and Whig Parties had struggled in the 1820’s and the 1830’s.”⁶⁴ The expansion of the manufacturing sector, stabilization of the banking system, and the development of privately financed railroads and canals in the North coupled with the undercutting of attempts to diversify the South’s economy away from monoculture farming (because of the growth in cotton demands) made the traditional party platform issues based on tariffs, banking, and federal financing of internal improvements increasingly irrelevant. With “relatively little to separate” the Democratic and Whig Parties, “it was natural that those who wished to see the slavery question at the center of political debate, whether to defend or denounce it, should point to the irrelevance of the Jacksonian issues.”⁶⁵

Furthermore, the changes that came in inter-regional trade in the 1840-50’s as a result of this economic boom and diverging economic models between the North and

⁶³ Post, 237.

⁶⁴ Post, 211.

⁶⁵ Ashworth, (2007), 485.

South would further weaken of the bonds that keep the two sections economically dependent upon one another, which allowed the contentious issue of slavery to come to the forefront as a national political issue. Traditionally, the North was dependent on the South for foodstuffs and conversely the North needed the South as a market for its goods. This began to change as the North's commerce became increasingly north-east and north-west centric as a byproduct of the expansion of the canal, steamboat, and railroad systems that was concentrated in the North while the South remained self-sufficient for its food supply and exported much of its cotton overseas. As Ashworth states, "The economic ties between North and South had traditionally operated as a counter-tendency" to the sectional polarization over slavery, but the weakening economic ties between the North and South removed "a barrier to the further growth of anti-slavery in the North."⁶⁶ The net result of these diverging economic models, weakening of economic ties, and resulting escalation of the political debate over slavery would be that northern Democrats and Cotton Whigs would be politically weakened in the process.⁶⁷ The Cotton Whigs with their mercantile and textile manufacturing ties to the South were heavily influential within the party in the 1830s and 1840s; however, the northern diversification of the economy and its commercial spread westward during a time of increased attention toward the slavery issue severely weakened this once powerful Whig faction. The northern Democrats in turn lost much of their political clout in the North as this minor faction became increasingly pulled into the northern commercial network during an era of heightened national division over slavery.⁶⁸ As will later be shown, this growing political vacuum in the North would be filled by an array of third parties which would

⁶⁶ Ashworth, (2007), 623-4.

⁶⁷ Post, 213.

⁶⁸ Ashworth (2007), 620-624.

culminate in the Republicans replacing the Whigs as one of two major parties in America.

Added to the effect of the market revolution on the increased polarization of the North and South around the issues of slavery was the effect of the increased concentration of slaves in the Deep South. By the coming of the market revolution, slavery had been blocked from expanding into the upper western territories by the Northwest Ordinance in 1787, which stated that “there shall be no slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory otherwise in the punishment of crimes.”⁶⁹ Slavery had also been seriously hindered from expansion after the abolishment of the African slave trade in 1807 and the Missouri Compromise of 1819-21.⁷⁰ The economic boom that came with the market revolution starting in the 1820-30’s resulted in a need for new labor to fill the growing demand in the industrial base of the North and the fields of the South. In the northern states this need for labor was filled by the influx of immigrants coming from Europe during this period. In the southern states a dramatic increase in global demand for raw cotton resulted in a high demand for slave labor on the large plantations. The net result of this was that southern states, especially the Deep South, would have to procure its new slaves from the border slave states which resulted in a dramatic decrease in the amount of slaves in border slave state areas and conversely a spike in the concentration of slaves in the Deep South.⁷¹ William Freehling underscores this point when he states that, “Whereas in 1790 almost 20 percent of American slaves lived in the most northern tier of the border slave states, the figure was down to 10 percent and falling by 1860.” He

⁶⁹ “Northwest Ordinance” *Library of Congress 1787, Journals of the Continental Congress* Vol. 32 Article 6, p. 343. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lljc&fileName=032/lljc032.db&recNum=352>

⁷⁰ “Act of 1807” *The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture: Act of 1807.* http://abolition.nypl.org/texts/us_constitution/5/

⁷¹ Freehling, 88-89.

continues by pointing out that, “On the other hand, in 1790 the area that became the Deep South had 20 percent of American slaves and by 1860 the figure was up to 54 percent and rising.”⁷² This shrinking sphere of widespread slavery in the South and its concentration into the Deep South would have a serious impact on the polarizing social/economic outlook of the North and South.

The result of these diverging economic structures on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line would have a profound effect on the populace of both sides and would draw them into increasingly confrontational ideologies. According to Ashworth, many northern yeomen farmers who lived off their own labors on their own land, and were often courted by Democrats, increasingly found themselves being pulled into wage-labor positions during this market revolution.⁷³ Post expands upon Ashworth’s contention by stating that the, “growth of markets and the deepening division of labour in the 1820s and 1830s, ‘accelerated the growth of wage-labour’ in the North.”⁷⁴ With northern laborers finding a new position in the market economy, abolitionists attempted to capitalize upon this changing economic relationship in the north by contrasting the role of the free-laborer with that of the slave. While traditional republican ideology of this era looked down upon a ‘hireling’ as being lacking in independence and subservient to the whims of an employer, Abolitionists, according to Ashworth, championed the virtues of being a wage-laborer as “honourable, natural and desirable”, who unlike slaves had the right to choose their employment and were free to pursue their own “individual consciousness” buttressed by an autonomous family life.⁷⁵

⁷² Freehling, 90.

⁷³ Ashworth, (1995), 493.

⁷⁴ Post, 205.

⁷⁵ Ashworth, (1995), 165.

A growing competitive and increasingly hostile outlook by northern wage-workers on the South was further antagonized by men like Salmon P. Chase of Ohio who helped to develop the northern idea that a “Slave Power” of a small group of rich southern plantation owners was attempting to gain control of the federal government in order to impose slavery throughout the growing nation.⁷⁶ The southern based Democratic Party’s domination of the federal government throughout much of the Second Party System, due in part to the increased census counts of the slaves by the three-fifths clause of the U.S. Constitution, in conjuncture with the crumbling state of the Whig Party in the 1840-50’s, only helped to validate northerners’ fears of the threat imposed on the nation by the Slave Power. Chase would become a leading voice in tying together a perceived anti-slavery sentiment of the Founding Fathers with the North’s fear of the growing strength of the Slave Power.⁷⁷ In a letter to Charles Sumner, Chase summed up his key arguments against slavery and the Slave Power. “1. That the original policy of the Government was that of slavery restriction. 2. That under the Constitution, Congress cannot establish slavery in territories. 3. That the original policy of the Government has been subverted and the Constitution violated for the extension of slavery, and the establishment of the political supremacy of the Slave Power.”⁷⁸ Chase’s interpretation of the Constitution helped frame the philosophical/legal bedrock for the third parties like the Liberty Party (1840-1848), Free Soil Party (1848-1854), and eventually the Republican

⁷⁶ Ibid, 73.

⁷⁷ Eric Foner, 87-88.

⁷⁸ Salmon P. Chase *Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 205.

Party (1854-present) that were forming to fill the political vacuum left in the North in standing up to the Slave Power and the spread of slave labor into the West.⁷⁹

The final northern sociological viewpoint that grew out of the diverging economic models of the North and South during the end of the antebellum period was that northern free labor wage workers were increasingly at risk of being pulled into class-based slavery by the southern Slave Power. As abolitionists, northern newspapers, and orators spread the virtues of being a free independent wage-worker, white northern workers began to look upon the condition of the southern slaves and ponder if this fate might happen to them.⁸⁰ Apparent evidence of a ‘smoking gun’ for southern plans to take slavery beyond that of African slaves in order to apply it to white workers came in an anonymous editorial in the *Richmond Enquirer* on December 15, 1855. This newspaper article, often attributed to George Fitzhugh a southern slavery supporter, began by stating that; “the defense of slavery had labored under great difficulties” and that this was due in part “because its apologists took half-way ground.”⁸¹ By confining the argument to black slavery, defenders of slavery had given up on the “slavery principle.”⁸² Furthermore, the editorial argued that “while it was more obvious that negroes should be slaves than whites” as blacks were seen as unfit for anything else than simple labor, “yet the principle of slavery is itself right,” he insisted, “and does not depend on difference of complexion.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Eric Foner, 87.

⁸⁰ Jeremy J. Tewell, “A Difference of Complexion: George Fitzhugh and the Birth of the Republican Party.” *Historian* 73, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 237. <http://search.ebscohost.com/>.

⁸¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, December 15, 1855, 1-2.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

This “complexion” editorial by Fitzhugh and other such southern proslavery works would be used by Republicans as a rallying cry for free laborers to unify against this enslavement of labor that was presented as being a key plank of the Democratic Party’s platform. In his *Irrepressible Conflict* speech William H. Seward, a prominent spokesman for the Republican Party in its formative years, summarized the growing awareness of the growing incompatible relationship between the northern and southern socio/economic models and the threat slavery and the Slave Power held over free laborers:

Our Country is a theatre, which exhibits, in full operation, two radically different political systems: the one resting on the basis of servile or slave labor, the other on voluntary labor of freeman. The laborers who are enslaved are all negroes, or persons more or less purely of African divarication. But this is only accidental. The principle of the system is, that labor in every society, by whomsoever performed, is necessarily, unintellectual, groveling and base: and that labor, equally for his own good and for the welfare of the State, ought to be enslaved. The white laboring man, whether native or foreigner is not enslaved, only because he cannot, as yet, be reduced to bondage.⁸⁴

The net result of the diverging, and increasingly incompatible economies of the free-labor North and slavery-based South, coupled with the associated growing divisions in the country over slavery, exacerbated by men like Salmon P. Chase and George Fitzhugh, ultimately resulted in the end of the Second Party System. It would be into this chaotic political landscape at the end of the Antebellum era that the Republicans would capitalize to become the only third party to successfully displace a sitting major party in American history.

⁸⁴ George Baker, ed. *The Works of William H. Seward* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884), 289.

Ascension of the Republican Party

As the Second Party System collapsed under the weight of the growing tension between the North and South over their polarizing economic systems and corresponding social ideologies inflamed by events unfolding in the western territories, a variety of third parties vied to replace the bisectionally divided Whigs as the main rival to the Slave Power controlled Democratic Party. While third parties like the Free Soilers and the Know Nothings (American Party) would achieve a moderate amount of electoral success, the Republican Party would ultimately prove to be successful in capitalizing on the unfolding events to become one of the two major parties in America. The final factor that would contribute to the Republicans' rise to national prominence would be the escalation of hostilities between the North and the South over the expansion of slavery into the West. How did the expansion of slavery into the western territories act as such a catalyst in the growing economic/social division between the northern free states and southern slave states?

The impact of the debate over slavery on the development of the Republican Party has been well documented by historians like Eric Foner David M. Potter, Michael F. Holt, and William E. Gienapp.⁸⁵ Of these decisive historical events of this era that resulted in the growth of the Republicans or Grand Old Party (GOP), it was the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that arguably marked a turning point in the beginning of the escalation of hostilities between North and South.

⁸⁵ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: American before the Civil War 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011); Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850's* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978; and William E. Gienapp, *The Origin of the Republican Party: 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 was an agreement between proslavery and anti-slavery factions of the Democratic-Republican Party (the only major party of the immediate period after the War of 1812) which banned slavery north of 36°30' north in the territories within the former Louisiana Territories except for Missouri which would be allowed to enter the Union as a Slave state with Maine entering as a Free state.⁸⁶ This bill was an attempt by the federal government to maintain sectional balance between Slave and Free states and for a short period this compromise proved to be fairly successful in containing the escalation of the debate over slavery. What is significant about this Missouri Compromise as it relates to this thesis is that it clarified the section division in the public sphere and would foreshadow events to come. As Glover Moore states, “In short, the Missouri Controversy was the first occasion which all strands in the fiber of North-South sectionalism were brought together and paraded before the public in magnitudinous proportions. This was the first full-scale dress rehearsal for the great sectional contest which was to dominate the last two decades of the antebellum era.”⁸⁷ This delicate balance of handling the slavery issue would begin to unravel with the Democrats gag rules that began in 1836.

On March 9th, 1836 after receiving an influx of petitions from men like former Whig and Congressman John Quincy Adams to abolish slavery in Washington D.C., John C. Calhoun, a leading pro-slavery Democratic Party Senator from South Carolina, introduced a proposal that would block the federal government from interfering with the South's system of slavery. In his speech on the floor of the Senate Calhoun asserted

⁸⁶ “Missouri Compromise.” *The Library of Congress*, 1820 Sixteenth Congress Session 1 Chapter 22, p. 545-548. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=003/llsl003.db&recNum=586>.

⁸⁷ Glover Moore. *The Missouri Controversy 1819-1821* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953), 342.

that, “The relation that now exist between the two races has existed for two centuries. It has grown with our growth and has strengthened with our strength. It has entered into and modified all our institutions civil and political. We will not, cannot permit it be destroyed.”⁸⁸ While Calhoun’s proposal was rejected by the Senate, the Democratic Party controlled House enacted a series of rules and amendments which sought to block anti-slavery petitions from being addressed on the floor of Congress. The result of these gag rules was to further unite northerners against this perceived Slave Power threat and to further expand the growing political/social chasm forming between the North and South.⁸⁹

The next major historical events that escalated the sectional division that undermined the ability of the Second Party System to squelch the increasingly divisive issue of slavery were the Annexation of Texas and the Mexican American War.

The Missouri Compromise and its ability to maintain a sectional balance between free and slave states would be severely challenged by the Annexation of Texas in 1845. In 1843 President John Tyler, a Cotton Whig from Virginia, attempted but failed to gain the passage of an annexation treaty with the Republic of Texas which had declared independence from Mexico. With just three days left before leaving office in 1845, President Tyler signed a joint resolution of Congress that allowed the annexation of Texas which outraged members of both parties who were against the expansion of

⁸⁸ “Abolition Petitions” *Library of Congress*. March 9, 1836, Senate 24th Congress, 1st Session, page 777. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llrd&fileName=022/llrd022.db&recNum=386>

⁸⁹ Gienapp, 362.

slavery.⁹⁰ Hostilities quickly flared between the United States and Mexico which resulted in the outbreak of the Mexican-American War in 1846.⁹¹

After the capture of territories that would become New Mexico and California, the United States was in negotiations with Mexico when Pennsylvania Democratic Congressman David Wilmot took the floor of Congress in order to attempt to attach the Wilmot Proviso as a legislative rider to the final negotiated treaty with Mexico to end the war.⁹² This amendment would ban the expansion of slavery into the new territories acquired from Mexico as a result of the war.⁹³ David Wilmot invoked the language of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 to his amendment to the appropriations bill which “Provided that, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico... neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.”⁹⁴ While Wilmot’s amendment passed in the House Representatives by an 80-64 vote, it failed to gain a vote in the Senate due to the time running out in the legislative session as the rider was being debated.⁹⁵ Over the next four years the Wilmot Proviso and its impact on the debate over the expansion of slavery would prove to be a significant catalyst in breaking down political allegiances along sectional lines and encouraging the development of new third parties.

⁹⁰ Joel H. Silbey. *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005), 88-96.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 113-115.

⁹² Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge. *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 230.

⁹³ David. M. Potter. *The Impending Crisis: America before the Civil War, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011): 18-23.

⁹⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 sess., p.1217. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>.

⁹⁵ David M. Potter. 22-23.

As result of the polarization of the country around the debate over the expansion of slavery into the acquired territories from Mexico and the northern perception of the major parties' inability in checking the increasing influence of the Slave Power, the Free Soil Party was created in 1848. This new third party, which was comprised largely of former 'Conscience' Whigs, 'Barnburner' Democrats, and Liberty Party members, would play an important later role in the foundation of the Republican Party. While there are many factors that contributed to the fracturing of the two parties, what is important to note for the our purposes here is that the debate over the expansion of slavery at the 1848 Whig and Democratic Parties' national conventions divided the anti-slavery Conscience Whigs in Massachusetts from the Cotton Whigs who dominated their state party,⁹⁶ and likewise in New York State at least temporarily the predominately anti-slavery 'Barnburner' Democrats from the more conservative 'Hunker' Democrats.⁹⁷ The Liberty Party members, who would make up the third main constituency of the new Free Soil Party, were an early third party created in 1840 that supported Abolitionists' efforts to influence anti-slavery measures in government. While the Liberty Party had poor electoral results, this early anti-slavery third party would help in the creation of anti-slavery arguments in the North.⁹⁸ Together these three groups would coalesce into the short lived Free Soil Party's first convention in Buffalo in 1848 where they agreed upon a party platform of support for the Wilmot Proviso and an end to any federal government support for slavery.⁹⁹ Salmon P. Chase, one of the key formative members of the Free Soil Party, summed up these proceeding in a letter to James W. Taylor, writing that

⁹⁶ Frederick J. Blue. *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics, 1848-1854*. (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1973), 42.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 44-70.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 75.

“(Preston) King made a few remarks declaring that he was in opinion that not only should slavery be excluded from Territories now exempt, but the General Government should ride itself of all responsibilities for its existence under sanction of national legislation.”¹⁰⁰ King’s comments as chairman of the convention were “received with acclamation, & a motion being made to adopt the Speech of the Chairman as the platform on Slavery, it prevailed without dissent.”¹⁰¹

What differentiated the new Free Soil Party from the former Liberty Party and what marks the Free Soilers as an important step in the development of the Republican Party’s ideology is that they looked to expand upon the general argument against the expansion of slavery by appealing to the specific interests of northern laborers. The Free Soilers, whose national ticket would feature both northern Democrats and Whigs, campaigned on a “need for the Wilmot Proviso to assure that western lands would be preserved for free white labor.”¹⁰² By deemphasizing the desire to end racial discrimination this new third party looked to gain the support of northern workingmen, especially in the Old Northwest, who were often apathetic or even opposed the anti-slavery expansion movement.¹⁰³

Additionally, the Free Soil Party looked to gain the support of northern laborers by supporting the idea of giving small tracts of western land to settlers rather than allowing it to fall into the hands of speculators. While the Free Soilers were not the first to champion this “Homestead” cause, calling for “the free grant to actual settlers” this new party would make inroads in attracting the vote of working class voters from their

¹⁰⁰ John Niven ed. *The Salmon P. Chase Papers Vol. 2, Correspondence, 1823-1857*. (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 183.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Blue*, 129.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

traditional support for the major parties, especially the Democrats.¹⁰⁴ These appeals to northern laborers to tie their interest with the fight to stop the expansion of slavery would eventually play an important role in the development of Republican ideology in the 1850's.

Over the next four years the nation was torn over how to handle the issue of slavery expanding into the western territories, but the eventual passage of the Compromise of 1850 would temporarily slow the sectional tension that was growing in the country. Like 1820, this compromise, originally drafted by Henry Clay, a Whig Senator from Kentucky, also tried to appease both sides of the slavery debate. California would be allowed to enter the Union as a free state, Texas would drop its claims to New Mexico's territory, and the slave trade would be banned from Washington D.C. In return slave holding would continue to be allowed in Washington D.C., there would be popular sovereignty in the New Mexico and Utah Territories, where the voters would determine whether they would be a free or slave state, and a Fugitive Slave Law which would require residents in Free states to return runaway slaves.¹⁰⁵ While the popular sovereignty and Fugitive Slave Act components of the compromise would stir a northern backlash against the perceived growing influence of the Slave Power in the federal government, this compromise would prove moderately successful in quieting the sectional strife for a few years until the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

The final remnants of the intersectional rivalry between the Whigs vs. Democrats that helped sustain the Second Party System while subsequently holding at bay the divisive issue of slavery would ultimately be undermined by the passage of the Kansas-

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 128-129.

¹⁰⁵ "Missouri Compromise of 1850". *The Library of Congress*. 1850, 31st Congress Session 1 Chapter 60. p. 446-462. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=009/llsl009.db&recNum=473>.

Nebraska Act of 1854. Stephen Douglas, the Democratic leader in the Senate from Illinois, helped craft this legislation which looked to address federal plans to build a transcontinental railroad route by allowing the creation of the Kansas and Nebraska Territories. The new legislation essentially repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 which prohibited slavery north of parallel 36°30' north of western territories of the former Louisiana Territory by applying popular sovereignty to the area, which would allow the territories' voters to determine if slavery would be allowed in their Kansas and Nebraska Territories.¹⁰⁶ Douglas defended this bill on the Senate floor by stating that “the Missouri Compromise, having been superseded by the legislation of 1850, has become and ought to be declared inoperative.”¹⁰⁷ He continued by asserting that “we propose to leave the question to the people of the states and territories, subject only to the limitations and provisions of the Constitution.”

This legislation outraged Free Soilers and free labor supporters and resulted in the writing of the *Appeal of the Independent Democrats* by Salmon Chase and Joshua Giddings. They challenged, “We arraign this bill as a gross violation of a sacred pledge; as a criminal betrayal of the precious rights; as part and parcel of an atrocious plot to exclude from a vast unoccupied region immigrants from the Old World and free laborers from our own states, and convert it into a dreary region of despotism, inhabited by masters and slaves.”¹⁰⁸ Chase’s manifesto, which Eric Foner contends was “one of the most effective pieces of political propaganda in our history”¹⁰⁹ contributed to a rising

¹⁰⁶ Ray A. Billing and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 239-240.

¹⁰⁷ “Speech of Honorable Steven A. Douglas in the Senate January 30, 1854.” *The Nebraska Question*. (New York City, Redfield, 1854), 37.

¹⁰⁸ “Appeal of the Independent Democrats” *Library of Congress Online* <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=945>

¹⁰⁹ Foner, 94-95.

view in the North that the Kansas-Nebraska Act was the latest in a string of attempts by the Slave Power to force slavery upon the nation. Northern Whig leaders, embarrassed by the southern Whigs support for the Nebraska bill, hoped to revitalize their collapsing party by capitalizing upon the slavery expansion debate; however, the Whigs' poor electoral results in comparison to anti-slavery third parties led many northerners to believe they needed to put their support behind one of the developing third parties in order to fight the Slave Power dominated Democratic Party's stranglehold on the federal government.¹¹⁰ With the Second Party System destroyed, the path was now open for the Republican Party to begin its rise to major party status. However, to achieve this ascension to becoming the main rival of the Democratic Party, the Republicans would have to overcome the challenge coming from their chief anti-slavery rival, the Know Nothings.

From 1854-1856 the two main third parties vying for the support of anti-slavery northern voters were the American Party (Know Nothings) and the Republican Party. The Know Nothings quickly won local and national elections running on a party platform emphasizing an anti-Nebraska Act component, nativism and temperance. During a period of heightened European immigration to the United States, especially by former Germans and the Irish¹¹¹, the xenophobic American Party had early electoral success; yet, internal and section disputes would soon prove to be the downfall of this short lived third party.

While the American Party was experiencing its meteoric rise in popularity in the wake of the Nebraska debate and influx of immigrants, the Republican Party began its

¹¹⁰ Gienapp, 82-87.

¹¹¹ Tyler Anbinder. *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

tentative formal steps in development during a meeting of anti-Nebraska House Representatives in Washington D.C. in May of 1854. While nothing came directly of this meeting, it was during this gathering of Anti-Nebraska Whigs, Democrats, and Free Soilers that an early agreement was made for the need of a new party based on a platform of opposition to the expansion of slavery that would take up the name “Republican.”¹¹² There would be sporadic development of proto-Republicans that year in the North; however, it was not until the first national party convention in Pittsburg in 1856 that the Republican Party formally took its place on the national political scene. One of the key historical events that led to this convention and the development of a national Republican Party was the unfolding events in the west, particularly Bleeding Kansas.

In passing the Nebraska Kansas Act Stephen Douglas and others hoped this bill would sidestep the sectional debate over slavery by allowing the residents of these new territories to decide for themselves whether they would be free or slave states. Shortly after the passage of this bill in the Senate, William H. Seward took to the Senate floor to respond to this legislation. “Come on then, Gentlemen of the Slave States,” he proclaimed, “since there is no escaping your challenge, I accept it in behalf of the cause of freedom. We will engage in competition for the virgin soil of Kansas, and God give the victory to the side which is stronger in numbers as it is in right.”¹¹³ Little did Seward know that his comments would ominously foreshadow the events to unfold in Kansas as pro and anti-slavery supports entered the territory in order to influence the territory’s 1855 election. With the numerical help of Missourians crossing into Kansas to vote, the pro-slavery forces won the election resulting in the creation of a legislature in Lecompton

¹¹² Gienapp, 89.

¹¹³ *Congressional Globe*, 33 Congress, Secession 1., appendix, p. 769.

that passed a series of pro-slavery laws for the new formally-recognized territory. Shortly thereafter, anti-slavery forces created a free-state shadow territorial government in Topeka. The polarization of the Kansas territory into these two rival camps resulted in an escalation of violence with two of the most nationally recognized events being the Sack of Lawrence where pro-slavery supporters attacked the ant-slavery town of Lawrence, and the Pottawatomie Massacre where abolitionist John Brown and his supporters killed settlers in reprisal for the attack on Lawrence.¹¹⁴ These events further pulled the debate over slavery into state and national politics and subsequently the northern support for the growing Republican Party which came to a head in 1856-57 with the Caning of Sumner and the Dred Scott Decision.

In the wake of the violence unfolding in Kansas, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, who would go on to become the leader of the Radical wing of the Republican Party, gave a the Crimes against Kansas speech which blamed the Slave Power for the events in Kansas. During his speech Sumner targeted his vitriol at Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina whom he characterized as a “Don Quixote who has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who ... though polluted in the sight of the world is chaste in his sight, I mean the harlot, slavery.”¹¹⁵ Enraged by the perceived slight against his relative, Representative Preston Brooks would later assault Senator Sumner with a cane that resulted in his collapsing to the Senate floor and not being able to return to the Senate for over two years due in part to experiencing psychosomatic shock.¹¹⁶ The Caning of Sumner would further the political polarization of national

¹¹⁴ Potter, 199-244.

¹¹⁵ *Congressional Globe*. 34th Congress, 1st session, May 19 1856. Appendix, 529-547.
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>.

¹¹⁶ Potter, 209-211.

politics around the slavery debate which would continue the shifting of northern voters into the Republican Party.

The final major historical event that contributed to the successful rise of the Republican Party was the Dred Scott Decision of 1857. In this controversial Supreme Court decision, the court overturned a lower court's ruling that Dred Scott was a free man because he had resided in states and territories that had banned slavery. The court declared that because Dred Scott was of African descent he was not protected by the Constitution and was not a United States citizen. The court went on to state that the federal government had no power in prohibiting slavery in the new territories because slaves were property and that the Fifth Amendment protected property owners' rights. While pro-slavery supporters hoped this decision would be the final say on the slavery matter, it would just add further support to claims of Slave Power abuses and the need for an anti-slavery party to win back control of the federal government.¹¹⁷ Together the publicity stemming from this series of historical events relating to expansion of slavery would finally give enough momentum for the Republican Party to become the main political rival to the Democratic Party.

As the pro and anti-slavery expansion forces faced off in the West, the Republican Party held its first national convention in Philadelphia in June of 1856 in a strong position to surpass the American Party and emerge the second major party in the United States. Riding on a wave of ant-immigrant/anti-Catholic sentiment as a bi-sectional party in 1854, the American Party swept into temporary power as a major party; however, their meteoric rise would be undermined by the fight in the West over slavery and the impact it had on the battle for the Speaker of the House of the Thirty-fourth Congress in 1855. In

¹¹⁷ Holt, 201-205.

one of longest and most bitter contests for the speakership in United States history, Rep. Nathaniel P. Banks of Massachusetts a former Democrat who became a Know Nothing and finally a Republican won the speakership by appealing to both nativist and anti-Nebraska Act congressmen. This protracted fight emphasized the debate over the expansion of slavery had permanently fractured the northern and southern wings of the Know Nothings. This resulted in the formation of the North American Party to challenge the Republicans in the North and the South Americans to challenge the Democrats in the South in the buildup to the elections of 1856.¹¹⁸

The Republicans first national convention in Philadelphia in 1856 was an important turning point for the fledgling new party. Realizing they were in the driver's seat in relation to the North American Party, Republicans turned down their overtures of a joint ticket of William P. Johnson as vice president with Republican presidential candidate John C. Fremont. The North Americans, lacking a strong candidate to run independently of the Republicans, "capitulated completely" and put their support behind Fremont.¹¹⁹ So ended the Republicans' main sectional rival, the northern branch of the American Party. The Republican Party had finally displaced its rivals and was in a position to become one of the two major parties in the United States.

The Republican Party entered into the 1856 elections on a party platform in which challenged "We deny the authority of Congress, of a Territorial Legislature, of any individual, or association of individuals, to give legal existence to Slavery in any Territory of the United States while the present Constitution shall be maintained."¹²⁰ By

¹¹⁸ Potter, 255-257.

¹¹⁹ Potter, 257.

¹²⁰ "Republican Party Platform of 1856" *U.S.History.Org*
http://www.ushistory.org/gop/convention_1856republicanplatform.htm.

emphasizing the abuses which occurred in the western territories at the hands of slavery expansion supporters at the state and federal levels, Republicans looked to capitalize upon the Free State voters' antagonism toward the Slave Power in order become the main political challenger to the Democratic Party. In addition, the Republicans took advantage of the fact that by the 1850's the voting demographic of America had been altered so much that the population of the northern free-marketers for the first time had become so numerous that a northern presidential candidate could win the Electoral College without a single southern electoral vote. While Fremont failed to win the 1856 Presidential election, his success in carrying eleven of the sixteen Free States coupled with gains made in the Congress firmly established the Republican Party in America's two party system.

In conclusion, while there were many factors that led to the Republican Party's electoral success, I contend the incompatibility between the economic/social systems of the Free Labor North and Slave Labor South and the subsequent unrest over which system would take hold in the western territories ultimately resulted in the meteoric rise to power of the Republicans. Early on in the Second Party System, the rivalry between the Whig and Democratic Parties that stressed debates over issues like tariffs and banking succeeded in containing sectional disputes over the contentious issue of slavery. However, as the market based revolution continued to reshape the economic and social structures of the country, the issues that had helped sustain the old political order became increasingly irrelevant to the voters as northern and southern laborers viewed one another's economic models as inferior to and a threat to their own way of life.

The ensuing debates over whether slavery and its corresponding economic/social systems would be extended into the newly acquired western territories thrust the slavery issue into national politics, forcing both the Whig and Democratic Parties to weigh in on the matter. While the Democrats proved more adept at addressing the issue as much of its constituency was in the South, the Whigs, which historically had been a weak bi-sectional coalition of legislators who had united in opposition to Andrew Jackson's presidency, now found themselves unable to adequately address the slavery subject without upsetting either their northern or southern voter bases. As events continued to unfold in the West, rival third parties like the Anti-Mason, American, and Republican Parties arose in the North to fill the political void left by the imploding Whigs to challenge the perceived abuses northern voters charged were unfolding as a result of the Slave Power's control of the federal government. With the Whig Party collapsed, the American and Republicans Parties faced off to see who would become the main rival to the Democratic Party. The fight over slavery in the Kansas/Nebraska Territories came to a head in the lead up to the 1856 election resulting in the American Party, like the Whigs, collapsing in upon itself due in part to its northern and southern branches' inability to agree upon a position relating to the expansion of slavery. Capitalizing upon the American Party's sectional split, the Republicans gained the support of the North American Party members, and by running on a strong anti-slavery expansion platform that emphasized the virtues of free labor over that of slavery, the Republican Party permanently established itself as a major party and became the only third party in American history to replace a sitting party in the country's two-party dominated political system.

The Republicans' success thus demonstrates the impact underlying long-term social conflict and economic change has on the breakdown of an existing two-party system. To further examine this aspect of third party success, we turn to a case study of the rise of the Labour Party in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Case study of the Labour Party

This chapter will examine the rise of the Labour Party to further explore the first question put forward in this essay, which is what were the key factors that contributed to a third party being successful in displacing one of the two major parties of its time. In the early half of the twentieth century the Labour Party achieved a remarkable achievement of becoming one of the only third parties in modern British history to break through the two-party hegemonic control of their parliamentary government. There are a wide range of explanations put forward by academics to explain the successful rise of the Labour Party; yet, I contend that of these it was the inability of the Liberal and Conservative (Tory) Parties to adequately address a growing social/economic issue in the country that ultimately allowed the Labour Party to ascend to major party status. More specifically, it was the failure of the Liberals and Conservatives to effectively adapt to the changing voter demographic and corresponding working-class demands tied to the growing British working-class movement that resulted in the successful ascent to power of this new political party.

The Liberal and Conservative Parties have historically been successful in defending their hold on the British political system from third parties by coopting or even incorporating into their party platform the issues that had originally given the impetus for the creation of and early support for fledging third parties. Their political order however would prove to be inadequate in addressing the demands from the newly enfranchised working-class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because to do so would have alienated part of the existing voter base. In other words, the two parties, and in particular the Liberal Party, could not shift their party platforms enough to please the

growing demands of the new working-class voters during an era of intense economic and social upheaval without jeopardizing the vote of their more laissez-faire oriented middle-class electorate. While the United Kingdom has an extensive history of labor political activism throughout the development of the Industrial Revolution and the maturation of its modern capitalist system, it wasn't until the rise of the New Unionism in the waning years of the nineteenth century, which allowed for the organization and expression of unskilled workers' discontent, that a successful working-class party would finally be realized. This case study of the Labour Party will highlight that while their rise to power was far from inevitable, they would ultimately survive the twist and turns of British politics to fill this new electoral niche and displace the Liberal Party as one of the major parties in the United Kingdom's two-party dominated political system.

Chartism: 1838-1850's

The first phase in what would be the working-classes' lengthy push for legislative representation that eventually culminated in the creation of the Labour Party was the Chartist Movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Chartism was a loosely coordinated working-class movement that sprang up roughly from 1838 till the early 1850's that pressed for political change in the Parliament and to expand the franchise to the working-class.¹²¹ The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to move away from an agrarian and hand crafted artisan based economy toward a more factory oriented production model during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution in the 1780's, which

¹²¹ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartist: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*. (Aldershot, Wildwood House, 1986), 1.

began to be fully implemented by the 1830's.¹²² This move away from the more historically traditional professions had a dramatic effect upon the populous of Britain by forcing workers into increasingly population dense cities in order to find employment. Working-class towns that became the epicenters of the Industrial Revolution such as Birmingham and Manchester had populations of 71,000 and 81,000 in 1800. By 1850, the concentration of workers into these cities had tripled and even quadrupled, with the population of Birmingham rising to 230,000 and Manchester to 404,000.¹²³ This massing of the population into increasingly compact communities in conjuncture with deteriorating working and living conditions would have serious long term implications for the breaking out of Britain's first working-class political movement, Chartism.

What helped to prompt what would become the Chartist Movement was the Reform Act of 1832, which was the result of years of parliamentary reformists' efforts to reform the House of Commons. This act, which would become the first a series of bills to expanded the enfranchisement in the country, gave the right to vote to the middle class which consisted of small landowners, tenant farmers, and shopkeepers while also removing smaller 'rotten boroughs' to be replaced by newer boroughs that represented the development of more populous cites as a result of the Industrial Revolution.¹²⁴ The passage of this act helped to demonstrate that political change could be attained; yet, it also convinced the working-class that they would need to come together in order to press the government for the vote and political representation of their own.

¹²² E.J. Hobsbawm. *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*.

¹²³ Paul, Bairoch. *Cities and Economic Development: From the Dawn of History to the Present*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 254.

¹²⁴ "Reform Act of 1832." *Living Heritage: The Reform Acts and Representative Democracy*.

<http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/houseofcommons/reformacts/overview/reformact1832/> (accessed June 20, 2013).

The passage of the Reform Act of 1832 pulled the middle-class property owners into the political process of supporting the Tories and Whigs, but it left the working-class as merely onlookers as the Parliament made decisions during the Industrial Revolution and early era of capitalism that increasingly had devastating long term ramifications on their professional and personal lives.¹²⁵ After years of political mobilization and activism, members of the skilled working-class came together to craft the People's Charter of 1838. This charter which would eventually be signed by millions across the country called on the Parliament to enact six basic reforms: 1) an introduction of a secret ballot, 2) all males over 21 should be able to vote, 3) constituencies should be of equal size, 4) no property owning requirements for Members of Parliament (MPs), 5) MPs should be paid, which would allow the lower classes to serve, and 6) annual elections to Parliament.¹²⁶ This charter was given to the Parliament, but was quickly dismissed by the government. A speech by Lord Thomas B. Macaulay, a prominent Whig whose party had supported the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, helped to encapsulate the viewpoint of many of his capitalist peers toward this proposed radical democratization of the British government when he stated, "I am opposed to universal suffrage The petition asks for supreme power; in every constituent body throughout the Empire capital and accumulated property is to be placed absolutely at the foot of labour. How is it possible to doubt what the result will be?"¹²⁷

Having their petition dismissed by the Parliament due in part to the concerns expressed by Lord Macaulay and others over how the expansion of the franchise would

¹²⁵ Dorothy Thompson, 5-7.

¹²⁶ A.L. Morton & George Tate. *The British Labour Movement: 1770-1920, A History*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart LTD, 1979), 76.

¹²⁷ Max Beer. *A History of British Socialism: Volume II*. (Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1921), 135-136.

threaten the political and economic stability of the country, over the next decade the Chartists began to switch their tactics from petitioning their government toward increasingly violent strikes in order to achieve their goals, but to no avail. By 1848, the movement was by effectively all extensive crushed leaving the laborers to wait until the waning years of the nineteenth century in order to begin to finally achieve political representation for the working-class.¹²⁸ The collapse of the first major working-class movement for political representation in Britain brings up two important questions as related to this case study. Why did the Chartist Movement fail, and how did this movement impact the eventual growth of the working-class movement of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that culminated in the rise of the Labour Party to major party status?

The Chartist Movement failed in its goal to gain political representation for the working-class as it relates to the later development of a successful labor-based party due to three major factors: government repression, a lack of support from the skilled workers and middle class, and a lack of strong unified leadership within the movement. The Chartist Movement sprung up during an era of widespread political activism across Europe. While the early Chartists were looking to reform Parliament and its electoral process, many of the similar movements in Europe, like the Nationalists and Republicans in France, were looking to overthrow their governments. The English government reacted quickly to the development of Chartism when it turned to strikes by using the police and military to suppress these political demonstrations. The Chartists would experience a similar fate to that experienced by the protestors and revolutionaries who rose up in the Revolution of 1848 across Europe in that the government forces were able

¹²⁸ Malcolm Chase. *Chartism: A New History*. (New York, Manchester University Press, 2007), 326-327.

to crush these movements, leaving the British working-class to wait over three decades before another opportunity would arise in order to gain the vote and achieve political representation in Parliament.¹²⁹

The second major contributor to the failure of the Chartist Movement, the lack of support from the middle-class and skilled workers, would prove to be an important factor in the collapse of this early attempt for working-class representation in the British government. Having received the right to vote as a result of the Reform Act of 1832, many of the land owning middle-class were content with their political gains and choose to refrain from supporting the reforms being championed by the Chartists.¹³⁰ Similarly, the skilled workers who had supported the initial efforts of this movement began to experience improved work conditions and pay through their newly formed unions, which resulted in their being unwilling to tie their fortunes to a movement of largely unskilled workers.¹³¹ Without the support of these two groups who were in a greater financial and electoral position to pressure the Parliament to address the Six Points put forward by the Chartists, the fledging movement quickly ran out of steam and was essentially crushed by the end of 1848.

The final failing of the Chartist Movement and arguably one of its greatest shortcomings was its lack of leadership, especially amongst its more militant elements. Chartism grew largely out of loosely coordinated local Working Men's Associations who emphasized a wide range of actions to be taken to attain political reform, of which the London Working Men's Association was the largest and played the most prominent role in the movement. While they differed on the ends and the means to achieve political

¹²⁹ Eric Hobsbawm. *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 121-123.

¹³⁰ Dorothy Thompson, 240.

¹³¹ Morton and Tate, 96.

reform in Britain, these associations ultimately agreed to the Six Points of the People's Charter of 1838.¹³² As it became clear that Parliament had no plans to voluntarily address their demands, these loosely affiliated associations struggled to agree upon their next course of action. The Chartist leadership was split between those who advocated moral force and those who pressed for physical force in order to press the government to address the demands of the working-class. William Lovett represented the moral force wing of the movement who pressed for peaceful actions like the continued usage of petitions to convince the Parliament to enact reforms along the lines of the Six Points laid out in the charter of 1838. On the other side were men like Feargus O'Connor who favored using physical force when necessary to achieve the goals of the movement when peaceful means failed. O'Connor and the physical force advocates came to dominate in the later years of the Chartist Movement, but the split between moral and physical Chartists took a serious toll on the movement.¹³³ Coupled with this internal fissure was the additional problem that the diffused nature of the Chartists as localized branches resulted in their inability to properly coordinate their political activities. Together the lack of a united centralized leadership in addition to the activities of the government to squelch this working-class uprising while failing to receive the backing of a significant portion of the skilled workers and middle class, played a significant role in the collapse of the Chartist Movement in 1848.

While the Chartists failed in their efforts to achieve immediate political reform in the country, this movement would prove to play an important role on the later efforts for labor political representation in the U.K. in the waning years. Most importantly, the

¹³² Chase, 7-11.

¹³³ Ibid.

Chartists represented the first signs of the development of a shared class-consciousness amongst the laborers of Britain. Even though this movement was short lived, the joining of forces of a diverse group of workers in order to achieve social and political reforms during this period represented “the first example not only in Britain but anywhere in the world of a truly national political movement of the working-class.”¹³⁴ The Chartists were heavily influential in the socialist writing of men like Marx and Engels; yet, the British working class would take develop own unique take upon this movement that would help shape the later development of labor political activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and with continued extension of the franchise to the working-class would eventually culminate in development of New Unionism and the creation and growth of the British Labour Party.¹³⁵

Labor Political History: 1848-1868

Before examining the formative period of the Labour Party, it is important to take a brief look at a few of the events that occurred during the period of what Eric Hobsbawm terms ‘the Age of Capital’ (1848-1875)¹³⁶ that would shape the political and social landscape in which the Labour Party would be created. In the wake of the tumultuous Chartist Movement era, the next few decades of British history saw the working-classes of the country stuck in a precarious position as the nation underwent the maturation of capitalism while also experiencing the effects of imperialism. As the historically isolated regions of Britain and its ever expanding empire became increasingly connected by way of rail and steamship, the British economy moved quickly toward the

¹³⁴ Morton and Tate, 99.

¹³⁵ Thompson, 330-339.

¹³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm. *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

implementation of policies that supported capitalism and further advances in industrialization.¹³⁷

Politically, this resulted in the shifting of political alliances which ultimately culminated in the establishment of the United Kingdom's first two major parties of the modern era mass party political elections, the Conservatives and the Liberals. On the one side were the Conservatives who supported a slower approach to political reform, had more ties with the British autocracy and the House of Lords, and were more generally supportive of imperialistic policies. On the other side of the political spectrum were the Liberals who advocated for political reforms and supported classical liberalism, which advocated a minimalistic government involvement approach and free trade in support of laissez-faire economic practices.¹³⁸

Socially, the further entrenchment of the capitalist system in addition to the growing labor competition from within and increasingly outside the British Empire forced the growing working-class to endure further deteriorating work and social conditions while still lacking political representation. Between 1850 and 1880 the urban population of the United Kingdom more than doubled from 10.2 million to 21 million.¹³⁹ During this same period the skilled workers saw a dramatic growth in unionization; yet, their older union leadership often failed to support the usage of strikes to address their concerns and instead increasingly looked to work within the system and in particular the Liberal Party to achieve their goals. As a result, many within the working-class of Britain increasingly came to support taking care of their own community through efforts

¹³⁷ Morton and Tate, 100-101.

¹³⁸ John R. Vincent. *The Formation of the British Liberal Party: 1857-1868*. (New York: The Harvester Press, 1976), xi-xxii.

¹³⁹ Paul Bairoch, 290.

such as forming cooperatives to alleviate their difficult conditions.¹⁴⁰ It is also during this period of the Victorian era that writings like that of Samuel Smiles entitled *Self Help* in 1859 became popular invoking the virtues of hard work and the view that through self-effort one could improve one's position in life.¹⁴¹ Due in part to the transformation of the middle-class and a growing segment of the political aristocracy's views from mob rule by the Chartist Movement to a more favorable impression of workers as self-motivated industrialists, many within the working-class finally were able to gain the vote with the passage of the Second Reform Act of 1867. While this act was also passed in part due to the Conservatives under the leadership of Benjamin Disraeli seeking to out-manuever the Liberals on their own party platform issue of enfranchisement reform, the working-class had finally gained a political voice in the United Kingdom.¹⁴²

This continuation of the shifting of the political capital into the hands of the working-class as a result of the Second Reform Act of 1867 was an important step in the creation and eventual rise to power of the Labour Party. In other words, the existing parties felt compelled to engage with the growing industrial working-class, yet the underlying transformation of the electorate and the economy ultimately fed into the rise of a new political party able to disrupt the old party system. Thus, this new act expanded the right to vote to most of the renters who lived in the city boroughs and reduced the property threshold in the counties while it gave the vote to agriculture land owners and tenants of small tracts of land. The net result of this act doubled the number of those who

¹⁴⁰ Morton and Tate, 108-109.

¹⁴¹ Samuel Smiles. *Self Help*. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002).

¹⁴² Morton and Tate, 118-121.

were enfranchised in England and Wales from one to two million.¹⁴³ With this first infusion of a large number of working-class voters into the voting population of the country, both parties soon realized that they had to attempt to adapt their party platforms in order to gain the support of this new electorate. It is into this dynamically changing political environment that the seeds would be planted for the creation of the embryonic organizations that would eventually coalesce into the Labour Party.

Creation of the Labour Party: 1869-1906

By 1869, the economic and political landscape of Britain had undergone such a dramatic transformation from the time of the Chartists that the time was now close at hand for a major push by the working-class for their own truly labor-based political party. With the growth of trade unions and the expansion of the enfranchisement to a significant block of the working-class from the Second Reform Act of 1867, the Conservative and Liberal Parties scrambled to adjust their party platforms in an attempt to gain the backing of this growing electorate. At first the Liberal Party were successful in swaying the support of a large segment of the working-class by tentatively supporting a few positive programs to alleviate some of the hardship experienced by this new voting block while additionally offering political positions for labor representation; however, over time many of the early labor organizations and their leaders became dissatisfied with the pace of change and broke ranks to form their own political party, the Labour Party. To explore how this process occurred, it is important to examine two key questions. What were the early labor organizations and their leaders, and how did the inability of the Liberal and

¹⁴³ “Second Reform Act of 1867.” *Living Heritage: The Reform Acts and Representative Government*. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/houseofcommons/reformacts/overview/furtherreformacts/> (accessed, June 30, 2013).

Conservative Parties to address the demands of this strengthened working-class result in the creation of the British Labour Party?

The first foothold into gaining political representation for the working classes came in 1869 with creation of the Labour Representation League (LRL). The Liberal Party created the LRL as an attempt to sway the vote of this new working-class electorate by helping them to register to vote and also to get their representatives into the House of Commons. The LRL would go on to win two parliamentary seats in the election of 1874. While this organization would be short lived and quickly overshadowed by the growth of later more independent labor groups, it played an important role in gaining working-class support for the Liberal Party and showing that labor could have representation in the House of Commons.¹⁴⁴

The second major institution that was created in the wake of the Second Reform Act of 1867 would be formation of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in 1868.¹⁴⁵ The TUC was initially created by the Manchester and Salford Council, a prominent voice amongst the Northern Trade Councils. One of the TUC's key functions was the creation of the Parliamentary Committee which as Morton and Tate state, “. . . functioned between congresses and occupied itself both with obtaining legal change and securing the return of trade unionists to Parliament.”¹⁴⁶ They were an instrumental part in helping the two representatives of the Labour Representative League, Tomas Alexander and Thomas Burt, former miners, to become the first members of the trade unionists and the working-class to gain seats in House of Representatives.¹⁴⁷ These Lib-Lab candidates, as they

¹⁴⁴ Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party: 1880-1900*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), 2-3.

¹⁴⁵ Morton and Tate, 123.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 124.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

would be dubbed, represented the trade unions but were only able to available to run for a small number of seats in Parliament and had to run under the banner of the Liberal Party; yet, their ability to run and hold office, even under the guise of being Liberals, demonstrated the growing trend toward labor representation in Britain as a result of the working-class movement successfully pushing to extend the enfranchisement to this growing electoral demographic.¹⁴⁸

The third important labor based organization that was established during this push for labor representation was the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893 lead by Keir Hardie, who would eventually become the first leader of the Labour Party. The ILP would act as the first truly independent party for labor voters and would play in a major role in supporting the newly created Labour Party through its formative years.¹⁴⁹

The final major organization to come out of this early period of labor political activism in the waning years of the nineteenth century would be the Labour Representative Committee (LRC) in 1900, and one of its most prominent members was its first secretary Ramsay MacDonald. The LRC would be one of the most important of these early groups in the formative stage of the Labour Party because it acted as the central organizational hub between the Trade Union Congress and the Independent Labour Party in pushing for joint action between the unions and other groups.¹⁵⁰

It was through the interplay of these organizations and their relationship with the two major parties as the New Unionism movement took hold in the United Kingdom that the birth of Britain's first labor based political party could finally be fulfilled. After the

¹⁴⁸ Roger Moore, *The Emergence of the Labour Party: 1880-1924*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), 8.

¹⁴⁹ Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie*. (London, Hutchinson, 1992), 100-104.

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 3rd Edition. (New York: Palgrave MacMillion, 2008), 8-9.

election of 1880, Henry Broadhurst as a representative from the TUC became the third Lib-Lab candidate to enter the House of Commons on the behalf of the working-class. While these new MPs may have wished to push for government interventionists policies like a eight hour work day that were being promoted by groups like the TUC to improve the conditions of the laborers in the country, their allegiances lied with the Liberal Party that often objected to any state interference in the free market.¹⁵¹ According to Henry Pelling, “the acceptance of Liberal political guidance of the Labour leadership was never more complete than in 1880” and added “there were few Labour leaders who regarded the establishment of an entirely independent workers’ party as a practical possibility.”¹⁵² This was about to change with the arrival of the Scottish Liberal Keir Hardie onto the political scene as a result of the growing demand for labor representation and further expansion of the vote to the working-class that culminated in the passage of the Third Reform Act of 1884.

Expanding upon the two previous enfranchisement acts to draw in a larger block of the working-class into the electoral process, the Third Reform Act of 1884 expanded the enfranchisement out from the boroughs into the countryside to renters who paid a minimal amount in rent, which helped to draw Scottish workingmen like Keir Hardie more directly into the political futures of the United Kingdom.¹⁵³ Ker Hardie, a miner from Scotland, quickly became disillusioned with the Lib-Lab MPs, and in 1887 Hardie attended the first TUC conference’s meeting in Swansea as a representative of the Ayrshire miners. During this meeting Hardie publicly lambasted Henry Broadhurst, a MP and the secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, for failing to stand up

¹⁵¹ Bob Holman, *Keir Hardie: Labour’s Greatest Hero?* (Oxford: Lion Hudson plc, 2010), 46.

¹⁵² Pelling, 3.

¹⁵³ Fred Reid. *Keir Hardie: The Making of a Socialist*. (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 75.

for the needs of the working-class.¹⁵⁴ Later that year, when the number of Lib-Lab MP's had risen to eleven, Hardie wrote in his partially self-funded monthly journal *The Miner, a Journal of Underground Workers* a scathing review of these working-class MPs, stating: "But what difference will it make to me that I have a working man representing me in Parliament, if he is a dumb dog who dare not bark and will follow the leader under any circumstances?"¹⁵⁵ While Keir Hardie still hadn't fully abandoned the Liberal Party, he would make his first tentative jump into politics as a third party candidate in the Mid Lanark by-election of 1887.

In the wake of a devastating mine disaster in 1887, Keir Hardie decided to approach the Liberal Party for their support of his candidacy in the Mid Lanark by-election but was turned down. Sensing that he might attempt to run as an independent candidate the Liberal hierarchy offered a safe seat for Hardie in the following year's election as well as a substantial salary but Hardie in turn refused their offer.¹⁵⁶ Before the election Hardie expressed his growing discontent with the Liberal Party when he stated, "Better split the party now, if there is to be a split, than at the general election; and if the labour party only makes their power felt now, terms will not be wanting when the general election comes."¹⁵⁷ Keir Hardie ran as the Labour and Home Rule candidate in a poorly funded campaign and lost the election to the Liberals winning just eight percent of the vote.¹⁵⁸ While he may have lost this election, Keir Hardie's campaign helped to confirm to himself that the answer to gaining representation for the working-class would lie outside of the two major party establishment. As Kenneth Morgan states, "His

¹⁵⁴ Pelling, 62.

¹⁵⁵ Holman, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 50-54.

¹⁵⁷ Pelling, 69.

¹⁵⁸ Holman, 54.

experience at Mid Lanark strengthened his view that the only sure route for the working class, as well for himself, was the path of independence.”¹⁵⁹ In the next year Keir Hardie would strike out to create a truly independent labor based party.

In 1888 Keir Hardie formally resigned from the Liberal Party and created the Scottish Labour Party (SLP). The program for the new party, influenced by the socialist Fabian Society, had a socialist slant, but did not call for the end of capitalism but rather looked to nationalize land, minerals, railways, and waterways, provide free education, and to increase taxation on the wealthy. Hardie didn't want to have a strictly socialist party and instead looked to have a large tent approach toward gaining the support of a larger percentage of the disillusioned voters. While Hardie and the SLP were able to gain the support of the mining unions they were still unable to gain the support of the more traditional skilled/trade unions. Hardie's timing to push for an independent political party would prove to be fortuitous as 1888 marked the rise of New Unionism across the United Kingdom.¹⁶⁰

New Unionism sparked a dramatic change in the demographic makeup of the unions of the U.K., which would transform their relationship with the political establishment of the Liberals and Conservatives. The term 'New Unionism' is in reference to the late 1880's and 1890's which marked a dramatic spike in trade-unionism and subsequently increasing conflict between employers and semi or unskilled-laborers. Many of the trade unions up to this period were specialized craft unions that had developed close relationships with the Liberal Party. Unlike the traditional trade unions these New Unions were organized general and unskilled workers who were denied

¹⁵⁹ Kenneth Morgan. *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 32.

¹⁶⁰ Holman, 54-62.

membership by the skilled labor unions and who also lacked access to political representation because of what Pelling refers to as the existence of a ‘labour aristocracy’ in Britain during this era.¹⁶¹ This labor aristocracy was a hierarchical situation amongst the working-class in British society where skilled middle-class workers through their old unions had greater access than the unskilled workers to political representation.¹⁶² Many of these New Unions were created in response to the successful London Dock Strike of 1889 in which dock workers won the right to higher wages with the help of support of the local populous of London. The successful strike of this newly formed Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers’ Union inspired the formation of New Unions across the country. These New Unions looked to push for political action through the two main political venues available to them in the late nineteenth century, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Labour Representation League (LRL).¹⁶³

It is with the help of these newly organized unskilled laborers that Keir Hardie won the 1892 MP election in West Ham South which was the first working-class seat in the Greater London area.¹⁶⁴ That same year the TUC put out a called for those looking to create a more independent labor organization, which resulted in a conference being held in Bradford in January of 1893. The result of this conference was the creation of the Independent Labour Party with Keir Hardie being selected as the party’s first chairman. Hardie’s Scottish Labour Party would join with the ILP a year later.¹⁶⁵

The ILP would join a number of other labor and socialist third parties in capitalizing upon the growing pool of enfranchised working-class voters who were

¹⁶¹ Pelling, 78.

¹⁶² Pelling, 78.

¹⁶³ Pelling, 80-83.

¹⁶⁴ Holman, 63-67.

¹⁶⁵ Pelling, 112-124.

increasingly becoming dissatisfied with the established parties. Early on these new mass unions provided their support largely to the Liberal Party but were getting little in return in the way of working-class representation. As Clegg et al. point out “The verdict on this record cannot be favourable . . . in a period in which their membership rose from three-quarters of a million to just over two million, they had only been able to increase their parliamentary representation from eight to eleven.”¹⁶⁶ This discontent of the unionists began to have its effects in local elections as laborers began to use their vote independent of the major parties.

Over the last remaining years of the nineteenth century membership in the mass unions continued to swell while the push for independent labor representation was well on its way throughout the United Kingdom; yet, these diffused organizations lacked a focused effort in their attempts to achieve political change. In 1900, the TUC hosted a London conference to unite the labor movement for political action that involved over seventy organizations, including the ILP.¹⁶⁷ Out of this conference would be created the Labour Representation Council (LRC) which agreed to Keir Hardie’s motion for a “distinct Labour group in Parliament, who shall have their own whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to cooperate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interests of labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency.”¹⁶⁸ This motion still left a lifeline out to the Liberal or Conservative Parties to allow representatives of labor to be a more active player in the Parliament, but

¹⁶⁶ Clegg, H.A., Alan Fox, and A.F. Thompson. *A History of British Trades Unions since 1889, Vol. 1: 1889-1910*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1964), 285.

¹⁶⁷ Thorpe, 8.

¹⁶⁸ A.W. Humphery. *A History of Labour Representation*. (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1912), 146.

the LRC were now willing to take into their own hands the expression of the interest of the growing labor electorate in the British government. In just six short years this loosely formed LRC would become the Labour Party.

In the 1900 election out of fifteen races only two LRC supported candidates won, one of whom was Keir Hardie. The weak electoral victory of the LRC can be tied to the low union affiliation and the poor financial situation of this fledgling group. In the first year since the LRC was formed only a dozen trade unions consisting of roughly 200,000 members had affiliated themselves with the new organization. Coupled with this problem was that the LRC was dependent for its income on subscriptions from its relatively few affiliated organizations, which meant they were unable to pay their officials or contribute much to the direct election of their candidates.¹⁶⁹ Their precarious financial situation would soon change as Hardie and the LRC would benefit from the Taff Vale Decision that would have long term ramifications for the LRC and the labor movement itself.

In 1900 employees from the Taff Vale Railway attempted to take advantage of Britain's engagement in the Boer Wars in Africa to improve their work conditions and to gain union recognition by going on strike. In response the company sent in its blacklegs or strikebreaking laborers, issued summonses against the strikes in breach of contract, and filed for an injunction against the union to refrain from these unlawful strikes. The strike ended fairly quickly but the legal action continued against the workers, and in September of 1900 Justice Farwell decided in the Taff Vale decision against the strikers. Even though an appeals court reversed this decision, the House of Lords upheld the

¹⁶⁹ Paul Adelman. *The Rise of the Labour Party: 1880-1945*, (London: Longman, 1996), 30.

original verdict.¹⁷⁰ A statement by Lord Macnaughten helped to summarize the decision of the House of Lord when he stated, “Has the legislature authorized the creation of numerous bodies of men, capable of owning great wealth and acting as agents, with absolute no responsibility by the use of that wealth and the employment of these agents? In my opinion Parliament has done nothing of the kind.”¹⁷¹ The net result of this decision was that the trade unions were now financially liable from picketing and the Taff Vale Railway in turn sued and won damages from the union. Watching this court proceeds were British unionists across the country that came to realize that “having been defeated at the polls and attacked by the courts, it appeared they had no alternative but to turn to direct parliamentary action.”¹⁷² Seeing a great opportunity for their fledging political organization, the LRC looked to quickly capitalize upon these unfolding events. It is into these dynamically changing fortunes for the unions of Britain that Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour Party’s second major leader, would step forward to help in the eventual formation of the Labour Party.

After it became clear from Hardie’s questioning of the Parliament in August of 1901 that the Conservative government was not going to take any legislative action to help the trade unions, MacDonald, writing on behalf of the LRC, wrote that “The recent decision of the House of Lords . . . should convince the unions that a labour party in Parliament is an immediate necessity.”¹⁷³ MacDonald’s observations would prove to be correct as these unions, increasingly under pressure from their employers and the press, came to support the Labour Representation Committee. The first wave of support came

¹⁷⁰ Adelman, (1996) 31-32.

¹⁷¹ Clegg et al., 315.

¹⁷² Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling. *Labour and Politics: 1900-1906*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 83.

¹⁷³ Bealey and Pelling, 77.

between the end of 1900 and the summer of 1901 when forty-one unions joined with the LRC bringing the membership up to 353,070.¹⁷⁴ The second wave of support came between the spring of 1902 and the winter of 1903 which saw 127 new unions become affiliated increasing the numbers to 847,315.¹⁷⁵ With major unions like the Engineers and Textiles Works and Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation joining forces with the LRC, 1903 marked an important turning point in the history of LRC and the working-class movement.

With the end of the Boer War, the Liberal Party found itself divided between pro and anti-imperialistic factions. A series of electoral losses from 1901-1903, due in part to anti-war Liberals supporting LRC backed candidates, made it clear to Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal Chief Whip, that a tactic must be employed to improved his party's failing fortunes. In a letter to Campbell-Bannerman, the party leader, Gladstone summoned up the dire situation of the Liberals when he wrote "We must try and hit it off with the Labour people . . . who are not really unreasonable."¹⁷⁶ Campbell-Bannerman agreed and gave his approval for seeking a political agreement between the Liberal Party and the LRC. In 1903, in what would come to be known as the Gladstone-MacDonald Pact, the LRC were giving free rein in roughly thirty constituencies' elections and in return the LRC would support the Liberals in other elections and a Liberal Government if it came to power. As a result the policies of the LRC began to tack away from the more socialist policies of its ILP members and more toward supporting the Liberal platform. In the election of 1906 the Liberal Party won back control of the government from the Conservatives with the support of the LRC members. In addition, as a result of the

¹⁷⁴ Adelman, (1996), 32

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 33.

¹⁷⁶ Bealey et al., 130.

MacDonald-Gladstone Pact, the LRC finally came into their own as an independent political power in Britain. This was soon demonstrated with the opening of the new government when the thirty Labour Representation Committee MPs elected their own whips, and decided to adopt a new name, the Labour Party. After nearly a century of political activism the growing and increasingly enfranchised working-class finally had a parliamentary party of their own.¹⁷⁷

Ascension of the Labour Party: 1906-1924

After a long drawn out struggle for the working-class to gain political representation and ultimately a party of their own in the Parliament; the Labour Party found that the move from a minor to a major party would be far more difficult than would have imagined. From 1905-1910 the Labour Party continued to grow at the local level; yet, their Parliamentary Labour Party struggled under the yoke of the MacDonald-Gladstone Pact to differentiate themselves from the Liberals in the Parliament. From 1906-1908 the Labour Party succeeded in gaining the passage of their own Trade Disputes Act in 1906 which reversed the legislation on the unions being able to strike to the status quo before the Tafe Vale Decision, but beyond that were only able to see a passage of a series of minor legislative victories.¹⁷⁸ By 1910, while the country continued to see the ranks of the unskilled laborers continuing to grow as a result of the continued industrialization of British economy, the Labour Party found its development stagnant under the shadow of the Liberal Party resulting in Keir Hardie declaring that the

¹⁷⁷ Alderman, (1996) 34-37.

¹⁷⁸ Thorpe, 23-24.

Labour Party had “almost ceased to count.”¹⁷⁹ This was in part because the Labour members of the Parliament had to toe the line of the Liberal Party’s traditional policies of limited government intervention in the country.

If the Labour Party struggled in its early years, how did they rise in just two decades to be so powerful that they could eclipse the Liberals as the second major party in the United Kingdom? On the one hand there are historians like George Dangerfield who argue in *The Strange Death of Liberal England: 1910-1914* that the decline of the Liberal Party could be seen in the immediate years building up to the onset of the First World War. Dangerfield makes a compelling argument that in between 1910-1914 the Liberal Party faced four rebellions that severely weakened the party as an effective governmental party. The first of these rebellions was the Conservative Party’s fight against the Parliamentary Act of 1911 which was a power struggle between the House of Lords and the House of Commons over budgetary issues. The Liberals would ultimately prevail in limiting the veto power of the House of Lords but the crisis severely weakened the party. The second rebellion was a protracted fight over Home Rule in Ireland. The Liberals had pushed for Irish Home Rule since the 1880’s but the struggle grew increasingly violent in Ireland in the immediate years leading into the First World War with the Liberal Unionists splitting from the party and even threaten civil war. This fight over Irish independence severely weakened the Liberal Party. The third rebellion Dangerfield discusses is the Suffragette Movement of the Pankhursts. This fight for women’s suffrage in Britain took its toll on the party and only helped to weaken any unified front of the Liberal Party. And the final rebellion Dangerfield discusses is the rise

¹⁷⁹ Branko Pribicevic. *The Shop Stewards’ Movement and Workers’ Control: 1910-1922*. (London, Blackwell Publishing, 1959), 238.

of the trade unions and their push for political influence and eventually a party of their own. Taken together George Dangerfield contends these four rebellions ultimately destroy the Liberal Party allowing the creation of a new political dichotomy in England.¹⁸⁰ Dangerfield summarizes his thesis when he states, “For it was 1910 that fires long smoldering in the English Spirit suddenly flared up, so that by the end of 1913 Liberal England was reduced to ashes. From these ashes, a new England seems to have emerged.”¹⁸¹

While Dangerfield does make a strong argument, the longer term trends I have already highlighted fit with a second school of political historians who contend that it was ultimately the Liberal Party’s inability to adjust to the changing political dynamic of the growing and increasingly empowered working-class demographic that played the decisive role that allowed the Labour Party to rise to power. Henry Pelling points out that in the early twentieth century the Liberal Party had become financially and organizationally weak due in large part to their party’s inability to adapt to the needs and aspirations of the working-class. While the Liberals prided themselves of being a classless party, they were in fact a middle-class party which could be seen from the makeup of its leadership of its parliamentary representatives and throughout their organization.¹⁸² Ross McKibbin adds to this contention by stating that the Edwardian period of English history saw the rise of ‘an acutely developed working-class consciousness’ and that while it was not demonstrated through their hold of Parliamentary seats, it could be seen in social and cultural factors and with the dramatic

¹⁸⁰ George Dangerfield. *The Strange Death of Liberal England*. (London: Transaction Publishers, 1933).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, xiv.

¹⁸² Henry Pelling. *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*. (London: Macmillan, 1968), chapter 6.

growth of the unions.¹⁸³ It was this growing working-class consciousness that represented the greatest threat to the hegemony of the Liberal Party, since as McKibbin states, it led to “a growing feeling in the country that the Liberal Party was no longer the party of the working classes, but that in some perceived if indefinable way the Labour Party was.”¹⁸⁴ It was this unwillingness or inability of the Liberal Party to adapt to the rise of the working-class, which ties into my thesis of a major party being unable to alter its party platform enough to address new political issues put forward by a growing new electorate without alienating its party’s original base, which resulted in the rise of the Labour Party. As George Bernstein helps to summarize, “if class politics were coming so was the decline of the Liberal Party – not immediately, perhaps, but eventually and inevitably.”¹⁸⁵ It was their failure to adapting their party adequately to this new voting constituency of the working-class, due in part to its close ties to the middle-class, that the Liberal Party would eventually be out positioned by the rising Labour Party.

Finally, other historians add to this discussion by pointing out that while the Labour Party did struggle in its infancy, there were signs they were beginning to come into their own just as the First World War began. Financially they began to regain their footing with the passage of the new Trade Union Act of 1913, which allowed the unions to use its members’ dues to finance and support Labour candidates. This occurred at an important moment for the Labour Party because trade union membership doubled from

¹⁸³ Ross McKibbin. *The Evolution of the Labour Party: 1910-24*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), xiv.

¹⁸⁴ McKibbin, 70-71.

¹⁸⁵ George Bernstein. *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 201.

two million in 1906 to four million in 1914 of which over half were affiliated with Labour. which provided a dramatic increase in the funds pouring into their coffers.¹⁸⁶

Of these growing unions, it was the 1909 affiliation of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to the Labour Party, formally ending the long standing link between the miners and the Liberals, which increased Labour's seats in Parliament by twelve. It looked increasingly likely that the changing social and economic conditions of the country were likely to push many more of these miner MPs into the Labour camp¹⁸⁷; and as Paul Adelman states, "what was true for the mining constituencies was true for other industrial seats."¹⁸⁸ While it looked likely that the Labour Party were on the verge of making electoral gains over the Liberals in the upcoming 1914 election; the outbreak of the First World War would be a new and instrumental chapter in the rise to major party status of the Labour Party.

With the onset of WWI the Liberal Government, under the continued leadership of Herbert Asquith, found itself coming under criticism for a series of defeats in the early stages of the war. As a result in 1916 the Lloyd-George Coalition Government was created as a coalition led by the Liberal David Lloyd George that was made up of Liberal, Conservatives, and representatives of the Labour Party¹⁸⁹. As the early years of the war continued to result in escalating loses for the British and the Allies, Lloyd George became increasingly dependent upon the Conservatives for guidance on the war.¹⁹⁰ It was this growing public perception of the Liberal Party having close ties with the

¹⁸⁶ Alderman, (1996) 44-45.

¹⁸⁷ Henry Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain*. (London: MacMillan, 1968), chapter 6.

¹⁸⁸ Adelman, (1996) 45.

¹⁸⁹ John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 6-7.

¹⁹⁰ Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party: 1914-1935* (London: St. James's Place, 1966), 96.

Conservative Party that began to severely strain the Liberal Party's ability to be seen nationally as a viable challenger to the Conservatives and which further helped to push voters toward supporting Labour candidates as a venue for addressing the needs of the working-class.

Additionally, Lloyd George's move toward the right resulted in a split within the Liberal Party that had long term ramifications for his party. In December of 1916 Lloyd George attempted to create a war council which in effect would have striped Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith from his control of domestic affairs. Asquith resigned from the coalition government in protest expecting to be asked back. This invitation was never given.¹⁹¹ As a result relations grew increasingly hostile between these two leaders of the Liberal Party which resulted in a splitting of the party at the end of the war between those who backed George and the coalition and those who favored Asquith.¹⁹²

Conversely, the Labour Party gained prestige as a legitimate mass political party during the war by having several of its members in prominent positions in the coalition government. The Labourites were finally free from the coat tails of the Liberals, and their policies toward addressing the needs of the working class and unions during this period resulted in a dramatic increase of support from the electorate. Before the war the Labour Party had backed legislation that would strengthen the power of the government to nationalize segments of industry like mining and railroads and to introduce social welfare programs that would benefit the working and lower classes. As the war finally moved into the Allies' favor, voters increasingly came to look favorably upon an

¹⁹¹ Paul Adelman. *The Decline of the Liberal Party: 1910-1931*, 2nd Edition. (New York: Longman, 1995), 18-23.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 120-122.

enhanced role for the government in society which further helped to strengthen the position of the Labour Party in the waning years of the First World War.¹⁹³

After the war a new general election was held in 1918 and the Labour Party found its political fortunes were vastly improved from its pre-war position. The Liberal Party came out of the war disorganized and still torn between Coalition Liberals and Asquith Liberals. In addition, these two Liberal camps struggled to develop a unique political platform to attract this new electorate without losing their base which left the Liberal Party unable to move far enough to the left to win votes away from the Labour Party that came out of the war generally unified and strengthened by its support for nationalization of particular segments of industry and its continued push for the addressing of domestic concerns during the war.¹⁹⁴ In 1918 the Labour Party went even further by adopting a new Constitution which established the party as a modernized organization and also helped to differentiate Labour from the Liberals by having a defined socialist ideology as demonstrated through the Clause Four of their Constitution.¹⁹⁵ This newly organized Labour Party with their new Constitution was in a great position to benefit from the fourth expansion of the voter suffrage that same year.

Furthermore, the Labour Party came out of the First World War positioned as the leading voice for the working-class in time for the passage of the Representation of the People Act of 1918. This act gave the right to vote to all men over the age of 21 many of whom were veterans or were of the working-class and members of unions. In addition,

¹⁹³ G.D.H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London: Routledge, 1948), 83-88.

¹⁹⁴ Adelman, (1996) 95-96.

¹⁹⁵ Adelman, (1996) 50-51 and Doc. 19 on p. 118.

many women over 30 had finally gained the right to vote.¹⁹⁶ The influx of these new voters would finally gave the Labour Party a decisive edge over the Liberals, which resulted in their dramatic growth at the local level in the 1918 elections, and in the 1922 election.¹⁹⁷¹⁹⁸

Finally, Duncan Tanner points to the impact of the redistricting of Britain as a result of the Representation of the People Act of 1918 as an important element that contributed to the Labour Party's success in the 1918 and 1922 elections. An increasing number of boroughs were created in the working-class suburbs and around mining areas which resulted in the election of Labour Party candidates in these areas.¹⁹⁹ Taken as a whole the inability of the Liberal Party to tack far enough left to outmaneuver the Labour Party just as a large pool of country finally received the right to vote after the war would ultimately result in the Labour Party winning twenty-one percent of the vote, which resulted in their displacing the Liberal Party as one of the two major political party in Britain in 1922.²⁰⁰ The war may have expedited the collapse of the Liberals and the rise of Labour, but it wasn't the key factor in this process. George Dangerfield helps to encapsulate this point when he states, "That extravagant behavior of the post-war decade which most of us thought to be the effect of the war, had really begun before the War.

¹⁹⁶ "Representation of the People Act of 1918." *Living Heritage: The Reform Acts and Representative Democracy*. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/case-study-the-right-to-vote/the-right-to-vote/birmingham-and-the-equal-franchise/1918-representation-of-the-people-act/> (accessed July 5, 2013).

¹⁹⁷ Chris Chamerlain, "The Growth of Support for the Labour Party in Britain" *The British Journal of Sociology*, 24 no. 4 (Dec. 1973), 486-487.

¹⁹⁸ H.C.G. Mattew and R.I. McKibbin and J.A. Kay, "The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party" *The English Historical Review*, 91 no. 361 (Oct, 1976), 736.

¹⁹⁹ Duncan Tanner. *Political Change and the Labour Party* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 386-387.

²⁰⁰ Alelman, (1995), 36-39.

The War hastened everything – in politics, in economics, in behavior, but it started nothing.²⁰¹

In conclusion, while there are many factors that can be connected to the growth and final electoral ascent of the Labour Party to major party status, the key contributor was the inability of the Liberal Party, who historically more supportive than the Conservatives of electoral reform, to adapt to the increasingly changing voter demographic that came with the growth of the empowered working-class populous as a result of the impact the industrial revolution and maturation of the capitalist system in Britain. More specifically, while the major parties were for a time successful in staying in power by gradually extending the franchise, it was the dramatic growth of unionism, and in particular the early twentieth century's New Unionism, that provide the financial and sociological support needed for the creation of the Labour Party and ultimately its ability to displace the Liberal Party as one of the two major parties in the U.K. The Liberals, whose core voting constituency was historically made up of the middle-class tied to the traditional liberal policies of minimal government intervention and free trade, were unable to shift their party stances to adequately appease the growing industrial working-class who were pushing for more positive government program and policies to improve their lives.

While in its infancy the Parliamentary Labour Party struggled to break from the shadow of the Liberal Party, the Labourites, at least at the local level, were preparing for a major push in the upcoming 1914 election to improve their political position right before the onset of the First World War. The war helped to finally break the Labour Party's reliance upon the Liberal Party, and to demonstrate that Labourites had the ability

²⁰¹ Dangerfield, xiv.

to be effective in government with their role in the Coalition Government, and to make the voters more comfortable in supporting the issues the Labour Party had championed before and during the war like nationalization of the railways and mines and the introduction of new social reforms.

After the war the passage of the Representation of the People Act of 1918 vastly increased the size of the electorate, especially amongst the working-class, who saw the newly organized Labour Party as a better alternative to the Liberals to represent them because the Liberals had failed to adjust their party platforms enough to address the changing economic and social conditions of their times. The Labour Party rode this wave of political change to finally displace the Liberal Party as one of the two major parties in the United Kingdom in 1922 and to create their first Labour Government in 1924. The rise to power of the Labour Party was far from certain, but this fledging third party successfully rode the deeper demographic and industrial structural shift that occurred during the maturation of the capitalist system in Britain and that pressed the older political establishment to expand the right to vote to a growing, and increasingly vocal and empowered new unskilled working-class segment of the population. By successfully riding through the twist and turns that came in the United Kingdom's turbulent political environment, the Labour Party found a way to transcend the traditional political science rules of the game to become one of the only parties in modern British history to successfully displace a sitting major party.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In the introduction it was stated that the purpose of this thesis was to perform a comparative analysis to determine how the Republican Party in the United States and the Labour Party in the United Kingdom were able to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to unseat a major party in a two-party system. The further aim behind this analysis was to determine if there are similarities in their rise to power that can be applied to considering the viability of current and future third parties in America. In exploring this question, this thesis began with an examination of the political science discourse pertaining to the institutional and sociological barriers that third parties in the U.S. and U.K. are up against, and continued with case studies of the Republican and Labour Parties to determine if there were similarities in the key historical/sociological factors that can clarify their political success.

After examining the constraints placed on third parties in the United States and Britain, it is easy to see why political scientists view third parties merely as fringe players in elections with little if any hope of actually winning and undermining the current political order. While the U.S. and U.K. have their own unique electoral systems and forms of governance, they share three key similarities in the restraints that severely hamper the efforts of third parties while also helping to reinforce the continuation of the current two-party system in these countries. The first of these is that the single-member-district tied to a winner-take-all electoral process in both nations results in two-party dominated political systems which tend to ostracize and limit the viability of third parties. This restrictive nature of the two-party predicated system has resulted in the second major restraint against third parties in that the electorate, who may in principle support a

third party's candidates, will in the end vote for a major party in order to prevent their least favored party's candidates from winning the elections. Added to this, the final key restraint that hampers the ability of third parties to be successful in the U.S. and U.K. is the impact of major party cooption of the issues that gave the early impetus for support for growing third parties. With these three major factors aligned against them, third parties have historically been unable to thrive; yet, somehow the Republican and Labour Parties surmounted these overwhelming odds to break from minor party status to become one of the two major parties in these countries.

To find out how they achieved such a remarkable accomplishment, this thesis developed a comparative analysis to identify any parallels in how the Republicans displaced the Whigs and the Labourites unseated the Liberals as major parties in their respective countries. While there were many factors involved in the ascension to power of both of these parties, in the end the research confirmed my contention that it was indeed the impact of the inability one of the major parties to adequately address a growing national cultural/sociological issue that was tied to a significant demographic change that ultimately resulted in the successful rise of the Republican and Labour Parties.

In the case study of the Republican Party, it was the debate over slavery and the economic/social conflict between the northern states and the market-oriented economic revolution and that of the southern slavery based economy that eventually led to the breakdown of the existing political/social order and to the eventual rise of the Republican Party. The political order of the Second Party System of the Whig and Democratic Parties was, for a time, successful in containing the contentious issues of slavery by

having bisectionally located parties that debated issues like tariffs and banking; however, as the North and South became increasingly polarized around their economic and corresponding social structures during the market revolution as the country was expanding westward into the new territories the major parties and, the Whigs in particular found themselves unable to adequately address the growing antagonism over slavery. The Whigs attempted to placate the growing tensions over slavery with piecemeal overtures in hopes of squelching this divisive issue, but the party's inability to confront the issue directly in fear of alienating a significant segment of its political base left room in the northern states for third parties to develop that would oppose the expansion of slavery head on. The Republican Party outmaneuvered its third party competitors in filling this political niche left open by the Whigs to gain the support of northern free laborers and capitalists and went on to displace the Whigs as one of the two major parties in America.

In examining the second case study of this thesis, the rise of the Labour Party, it was determined that while many factors did play a part in this party's rise to major party status, it was the inability of the Liberal Party to adequately confront the demands of a growing labor-based electorate during a time of major economic/social upheaval that ultimately resulted in rise of the Labourites. During the maturation of the British working-class movement, the political order of the Conservative and Liberal Parties attempted to respond to the growing demands for political representation and economic relief for the working-class by offering a gradual expansion of the enfranchisement to the lower classes. This fed into a cycle of growing labor-based demands as the pool of working-class voters grew over the course of the nineteenth century, and the Liberal

Party found they were increasingly unable to appease the demands of this new electorate without alienating their middle-class voting base who supported more laissez-faire types of governmental policies. Like the Republicans in the United States, the Labourites began to fill the political niche left exposed by the major parties, and when a large segment of the working-class finally gained the right to vote in 1918, the Labour Party would ride this wave of new voters into ousting the Liberals as one of two major parties in Britain. It is this inability of the major parties in both countries to adequately address a growing economic/social issue during a period of dramatic demographic change that this thesis helps to highlight as a cause of third party success.

As the political science study of the restraints on third parties has shown, the rules of the game in elections in both countries have made it virtually impossible for a third party to displace a sitting party in a two-party system. The major parties in both the United States and the United Kingdom have helped to structure the system so that the electorate rarely will risk wasting their vote on a third party, and even when a third party begins to gain some traction the major parties will undermine the support for this new party by taking on that party's key issues. In the case of the Republican and Labour Parties, the old political orders were unable to adapt because in both nations there was a deeper cultural/sociological shift occurring that in the long term these older parties simply couldn't redesign themselves to confront. In both countries the impact of industrialization upon the economic and social structure altered the voter demographic away from that which had given rise to the major parties of the original political order. As the process continued, the fundamental demographic and sociological shift of the electorate toward market-based free laborers in the northern United States and an

increasingly unionized working-class in Britain began to undermine the root of the major parties. While it was not inevitable that the Republicans and Labourites would rise to major party status, these parties successfully rode out the twist and turns that comes with national elections to capitalize upon these fundamental changes and become the rare examples of successful third parties in the U.S. and U.K. that displaced a sitting major party in a two-party political system.

Finally, with the results of this comparative analysis at hand, this conclusion will now look to briefly outline how this information can provide starting points for the study of current and future third parties in a two-party dominated system like that of the United States. Because it has taken a fundamental economic and demographic change to allow a third party to grab a foothold on a divisive issue that the existing party system cannot adequately address, this suggests we should look to identify potential future ruptures along these lines as a crucial element in any successful third party. While any detailed speculation on this topic lies beyond the scope of this thesis, I can hypothesize two potential factors that may give impetus for the rise of a third party to major party status in the United States. These examples at least suggest the kind of underlying changes we should seek to identify in understanding the prospects for third party efforts in the United States.

The first possibility worth noting would be a major change in the ethnic background of the electorate. We are already beginning to see the impact of the growth in the Latino population upon American elections. If this process continues and the voting pattern of the Hispanic population stays on its current trajectory, the Republicans appear more vulnerable than the Democrats to being undermined by this demographic shift. While the

leadership of the Republican Party continues to make appeals to this growing electorate they may find that they cannot alter their party platform too far in the fear of alienating a significant portion of their electoral base.

The second major change that seems within the realm of current possibilities as something that could result in a third party potentially finding an opportunity for major party success is the impact of severe environmental change. If environmental scientists are correct in that we can expect increasing warming of the planet and corresponding extreme shifts in weather that may cause draughts and flooding, there can potentially be a dramatic growth in a voting demographic for the government to take a stronger rule in alleviating these deteriorating weather conditions. These extreme environmental changes could result in the growth of a third party that would push for drastic action to be taken like placing high taxes on gasoline to get people to switch to more green energy sources like electric or to put limits on how much power a household would be able to use in a day as a mean of curtailing the impact on the environment. While the existing major parties may promote moderate action to be taken under this environmental scenario, they may not be able to support the more aggressive action being proposed by the new third party because to do so may alienate part of their voter base that would be impacted by these new taxes and energy limits. The environmental issue based third party could capitalize on this exposed political niche and ride the wave of this new voter demographic to displacing one of the two major parties in the country.

Beyond focusing our attention on these kinds of fundamental social tensions as a cause of third party success, the results of this study offer the potential for future research by developing additional case studies for comparative analysis from other democratic

countries whose political systems are dominated by two major parties like that of the U.S. and the U.K. Australia and New Zealand offer the most promising potential for a continuation of this comparative study of successful third parties due to their historical and cultural ties with the United States.

In conclusion, while there may be occasional bubbling up of voter discontent that results in the development of groups like the Greens and the Tea Party, the political system has proven to be adept at containing these short term expressions of political discontent within the framework of the two major parties. However, under extreme conditions, a fundamental sociological and demographic change may occur which supports the addressing of issues that the major parties will be unable to adequately incorporate for fear of upsetting their core base supporters. It is this context which could ultimately result in the successful rise of a third party to major party status. With congressional approval rating at a near record low as voters become increasingly disgruntled over the gridlock in Washington D.C., both the Democratic and Republican Parties may one day find that such a circumstance may arise that will ultimately result in one of their parties joining the Whigs as a mere footnote in America's political history.

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