

The Politics Insurgents Make: Reconstructive Reformers in American and British Postwar Party Development

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Abstract:

As political parties and party systems across the democratic world are being roiled by insurgent challengers, political scientists need to think more systematically about insurgents and the politics they make. In this article I propose a new analytic framework for the study of electoral insurgents and their systemic impact on politics. Varying along dimensions of regime- and party-orientation, I argue that insurgencies unfold in four distinct patterns: reconstructive; co-optive; reorienting; and reactive. I make the case for one particular type by comparing two reconstructive insurgencies during the postwar period in which the structure, rules, and procedures of an existing major party were challenged and reformed: the New Politics movement inside the Democratic Party; and the New Left in the British Labour Party. In both cases, reconstructive insurgents had durable effects on party development by altering the rules of the game and shifting the organizational terrain on which subsequent political contests unfolded. These cumulative changes institutionalized a reformist dynamic in both parties that has routinely drawn organizational issues into intraparty contests, undermining the legitimacy of the parties over time. Thinking systematically about the politics insurgents make offers a new way of understanding the role of social movements and political entrepreneurs in party development.

Key words: Political parties; social movements; party reform; Democratic Party; Labour Party; American Political Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Political parties and party systems across the democratic world appear to be in the grip of insurgent challengers. From the candidacies of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the 2016 US primaries to the collapse of the party system and the rise of Emmanuel Macron in France, the emergence of new parties of the left in Greece, Spain, and Portugal, new parties of the right in Germany, Hungary, and Austria, and the rise of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the British Labour Party – political systems that appear unable to offer popular and legitimate responses to rising inequality, economic and ecological crises, and widespread social and cultural change have been convulsed over the last decade. This wave of political insurgency presents a confounding set of practical problems for modern democracies and the populations they seek to govern. Coming to terms with this widespread phenomenon requires developing new analytic perspectives that can help illuminate the politics insurgents make and the systemic impact they have on the dynamics of political development.

Historically oriented political scientists, however, have much work to do on developing a systematic understanding of insurgent politics.¹ As Bruce Miroff has rightly pointed out, filling

¹ Daniel Tichenor and Daniel Fuerstman, “Insurgency Campaigns and the Quest for Popular Democracy: Theodore Roosevelt, Eugene McCarthy, and Party Monopolies,” *Polity* 40 (January 2008): 49-69.

this gap requires going beyond traditional disciplinary silos of movement and party scholarship “to develop categories pertinent to the *interaction* of movements with other (and more mainstream) political forces.”² The study of electoral insurgencies, then, requires drawing new connections between institutional and contentious forms of politics as upsurges in popular mobilization collide and intersect with representative institutions and create opportunities for political entrepreneurs looking to transform politics and policies.³ As institutions that combine representative and governing functions, political parties are inevitably situated on the frontlines of a changing polity, becoming both foil and vehicle for electorally charged revolts against the establishment. Whether genuinely tied to grassroots organizations or a phenomenon of astroturf, or some combination of both, insurgencies happen when movements and parties collide.

In this article, I propose a new analytic framework for the study of insurgent politics by adapting Stephen Skowronek’s approach to the study of presidential leadership in political time.⁴ Varying along dimensions of regime- and party-orientation, I argue that insurgencies unfold in four distinct patterns: reconstructive; co-optive; reorienting; and reactive; and have differing developmental effects on party organization, ideology, coalition making, and policy. While a full demonstration of the utility of this framework is beyond the scope of this article, I make the case for one particular type by offering a comparative examination of two reconstructive insurgencies during which the structure, rules, and procedures of an existing major party came under intense political contestation: the New Politics reform movement inside the US Democratic Party during the late 1960s and early 1970s; and the New Left in the British Labour Party during the 1970s

² Bruce Miroff, “Movement Activists and Partisan Insurgents,” *Studies in American Political Development* 21 (Spring 2007), 93.

³ Adam D. Sheingate, “Political Entrepreneurship, Institutional Change, and American Political Development,” *Studies in American Political Development* 17 (Fall 2003): 185-203; Daniel Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 5-6.

⁴ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3-58; *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

and 1980s. As I will show, reconstructive insurgencies emerge in predictable, patterned ways when existing relations of political authority in the polity undergo a crisis of legitimacy and enter a period of instability or regime crisis, providing proponents of political change with a window of opportunity to advance their claims.

Moreover, beyond their pattern of emergence, reconstructive insurgencies have predictable effects on party organizational development as well. In both the US and the UK, insurgents engineered major alterations to the rules and procedures influencing intraparty governance in the course of their insurgent gambit. Unsurprisingly, such radical actions helped mobilize formidable coalitions of intraparty opponents of reform, who shared a collective stake in the old ways of party governance and resisted its alteration. In both cases, counter-reformers framed their opposition to the reform movements and their rule changes in light of the perceived electoral harm they attributed to the undue influence of activists in candidate selection, policy development, and in shaping the party's public image. Both the Democratic Party and the Labour Party saw the rise of coordinated intraparty campaigns to retake the party from its activist base and reinvent the party's identity to appeal to defecting voters. Organized under banners such as the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, the Committee on Party Effectiveness, and eventually the Democratic Leadership Council, the rise of what became known as the New Democrats in the early 1990s in the US was mirrored across the Atlantic in the Manifesto Group, the Campaign for Labour Victory, and the Labour Solidarity Campaign that carried Tony Blair and his New Labour faction to the party leadership in 1994. While New Democrats and New Labour both eventually returned their parties to national power, which had persistently eluded their insurgent counterparts, neither faction was able to unmake the procedural changes insurgents had previously installed. Ironically, rather than simply turning back the clock, counter-reformers

found it necessary to propose and implement *new* rounds of party reform to disempower their opponents. Thus, although New Politics and New Left insurgents were eventually routed by the New Democrats and New Labour, respectively, reformers had managed to reconstruct party politics in ways that proved impossible to reverse and quite consequential in their long-run effects. In short, the politics these insurgents made effectively embedded a reformist dynamic in their parties, in which rules and procedure routinely become caught up in intraparty contests, posing difficult problems for the legitimacy of the organization over time. As recent controversies over the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour Party and the role of superdelegates in the 2016 Democratic nominating contest remind us, procedural changes and conflicts over rules have remained an active source of power disputes between intraparty factions on both sides of the Atlantic.

As the cases also demonstrate, political insurgencies are an especially appropriate research avenue for the tradition of American Political Development (APD), because even when insurgents fail to win their ultimate goal (elected office), they can still have very significant lasting effects on the institutions and political cultures they interact with.⁵ More so than personalized campaigns organizations or leadership contests that unfold within a stable set of rules, reconstructive insurgencies have especially significant developmental legacies precisely because they alter the rules of the game and shift the institutional terrain on which subsequent political contests unfold. Reconstructive insurgencies thus constitute an important instance of what Orren and Skowronek have called “durable shifts in governing authority,” albeit inside political parties with wider repercussions on the polity.⁶ Developing a better conceptual

⁵ See also, in this vein, Jeffrey K. Tullis and Nicole Mellow, *Legacies of Losing in American Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁶ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123.

understanding of political insurgency can therefore help APD scholars and other political scientists better comprehend the nature of partisan change over time and provide us with additional insight on how we arrived at the current historical juncture and its array of insurgent challengers.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF INSURGENT POLITICS

A general framework for the systematic study of political insurgencies has all too often fallen between the disciplinary stools of political science and sociology and their respective foci on institutional and contentious forms of politics.⁷ Political scientists have devoted detailed attention to third-party efforts, leadership selection mechanisms, and their effects on the outcomes of electoral contests.⁸ While significant moments of procedural and organizational reform have captured political scientists' attention, these accounts have often failed to integrate party insurgents' connections to extra-party forms of contentious politics.⁹ Political sociologists, on the other hand, have specialized in elaborating a vast, rich literature on contentious forms of collective action, especially social movements, including their interactions with state structures.¹⁰

⁷ Stephanie L. Mudge and Anthony S. Chen, "Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 40 (2014): 305-30.

⁸ Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in American* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); William P. Cross and Richard S. Katz, eds, *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹ William Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischief of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Philip Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 88-132.

¹⁰ See, for example, Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

But social movement scholars have only recently begun to highlight movements' interactive relationships with political parties.¹¹

Recently, however, historians, sociologists, and political scientists working within the APD or historical institutionalist tradition have started to address this lacuna in earnest.¹² Together these scholars have found that movement actors and internal party factions have played important roles in influencing nominating contests, shifting policy agendas, recomposing coalitions, and transforming internal party procedures in their quest to push the party system away from the median voter and toward their demands, values, and priorities. Scholars who have done comparative work on political insurgencies have produced enlightening accounts on individual insurgent campaigns, especially high-profile contests for party nominations or third-party bids for the presidency.¹³ But political scientists still lack a general framework that can help arrange and make sense of such a bewildering variety of cases. By taking a systematic look at the politics insurgents make, we can gain new insight into the patterns of political development across history.

Insurgencies vary in kind along two key dimensions: orientation to the prevailing political regime (what Orren and Skowronek call the “constellation of rules, practices, institutions, and ideas that hold together over time”); and orientation to the existing party

¹¹ Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow, “Ballots and Barricades: On the Reciprocal Relationship between Elections and Social Movements,” *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (June 2010): 529-42; Jack A. Goldstone, ed., *States, Parties, and Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹² See, for example, Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Doug McAdam and Karina Kloos, *Deeply Divided: Racial Politics and Social Movements in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Schlozman, *When Movements Anchor Parties*; Eric Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism, 1932-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Christopher Baylor, *First to the Party: The Group Origins of Political Transformation* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); and Sam Rosenfeld, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

¹³ See especially Tichenor and Fuerstman, “Insurgency Campaigns and the Quest for Popular Democracy”; and Andrew E. Busch, “More Than a Trace: Political Periods, Presidential Losers, and the Goldwater and McGovern Experiences,” *The Forum* 12 (2014): 465-80. See also, Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2007).

system.¹⁴ In short, they vary in terms of politics and strategy. On the one hand, while all insurgents (by definition) draw on popular dissatisfaction with the status quo to demand political change, some do so by seeking to extend, renew, or reorder the core commitments of ideology and interest undergirding the prevailing political regime, often in response to newly mobilized constituencies and their claims to the rights and benefits of full citizenship. Other insurgents, however, directly challenge the policies and principles of the existing order, declaring them bankrupt and seeking their total repudiation. On the other hand, regarding the means to their ends, insurgents can either “bore from within,” as V. O. Key once put it, to colonize an existing major party in their quest for victory, or they can launch a rival party organization from outside the existing party system.¹⁵

Table 1 displays four categorical types of insurgent politics that emerge from this basic framework. Electoral insurgencies are, of course, composed of a number of individuals, political tendencies, and ideas, and are therefore unlikely to fit perfectly in any single quadrant. Indeed, there are a number of tough cases that can be found which seem to blend several types of insurgency or move from one quadrant to another in the course of a campaign. Nevertheless, as my cursory elaboration below will demonstrate, each category still manages to illuminate important qualities about the different kinds of politics insurgents can make, and offers considerable analytic leverage in explaining conforming and deviating cases alike.

¹⁴ Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*, 16.

¹⁵ V. O. Key, Jr, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Crowell Company, 1964), 278.

Table 1: A Typology of Insurgent Politics

		Orientation to Political Regime	
		Extension	Repudiation
Orientation to Party System	Bore from within	<i>reconstructive</i> <i>New Politics;</i> <i>British New Left;</i> <i>Sanders(?)</i>	<i>co-optive</i> <i>Goldwater; Reagan;</i> <i>Trump(?)</i>
	Third party bid	<i>reorienting</i> <i>TR; Perot</i>	<i>reactive</i> <i>Thurmond; Wallace</i>

Reconstructive insurgencies

As the two cases below will demonstrate, reconstructive insurgencies display a critical yet supportive orientation to the prevailing political regime, often emphasizing very specific elements of its ideological and interest profile for extension to new groups, particularly those newly mobilized in the course of insurgency, or for a restoration of the regime’s founding principles. In both cases, third-party bids for power were rejected in favor of reorganizing the structure of an existing major party to recast authority relations between elites and the party base to empower insurgents’ influence over party policy. This strategy was informed in part by the perceived vulnerability of party elites, who were temporarily robbed of their authority by the legitimacy crisis engulfing the regime. Given the radical scope of their reformist party projects, reconstructive insurgencies necessarily unfold over a number of years and generally encompass more than one electoral cycle. They therefore constitute genuine movements that “string together events and campaigns as part of an extended effort to achieve real gains politically.”¹⁶ While this makes them the least visible form of insurgent politics, it does not mitigate their developmental impact, as we will see below.

¹⁶ David S. Meyer, *The Politics of Protest: Social Movements in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13.

Historically, this form of insurgency is the most uncommon, though a case could be made that the Sanders insurgency in the 2016 Democratic primaries fits most of the criteria, though it may be too early to draw any firm conclusion. In any event, since the turn of the twentieth century I have identified only one clear case in American political history: the post-1968 New Politics movement in the Democratic Party. However, a remarkably similar insurgency developed within the British Labour Party only several years after its US predecessor. This suggests three things. First, that the New Politics movement constitutes a genuine *type* of insurgency, rather than an anomalous outlier. Second, the unusual circumstances of regime crisis under which this type of insurgency can develop helps explain why the phenomenon is so rare. And third, the near coincidence of the Democratic and Labour insurgencies in historical time suggests that global influences stretching across the advanced capitalist countries (Keynesian macroeconomic management, the Bretton Woods system, labor-capital accords, cold war internationalism, growth liberalism) may also be an important set of factors conditioning domestic regime stability.

Co-optive insurgencies

Co-optive insurgents also bore from within an existing major party, but do so in a vocal campaign against the prevailing regime. Standing athwart the core commitments of ideology and interest in the polity, these insurgents voice the need for a fundamental break with widely accepted policy paradigms and governing philosophies. They propose returning to first principles and mobilize an alternative party coalition to help realize their aims. Contrary to their reconstructive counterparts, however, co-optive insurgents rout their intraparty opponents and capture the castle fully intact without engineering any significant organizational change in the

process of their conquest. The resulting capture may be a fleeting hostile takeover or the consolidation of a durable party faction or even a “party within a party.”¹⁷ Historically, we can see Barry Goldwater’s 1964 Republican presidential nomination and Ronald Reagan’s near-successful nomination bid against President Gerald Ford in 1976 as clear-cut examples of such co-optive insurgencies.¹⁸ More recent examples include protest movements such as the Tea Party and, while much more detailed analysis is required, Donald Trump’s capture of the 2016 Republican presidential nomination.

Reorienting insurgencies

Both reconstructive and co-optive insurgents typically regard third-party attempts as illusory, and for good reason considering the significant institutional and behavioral barriers militating against minor-party success in single-member plurality systems. Occasionally, however, insurgents break through and make a bid for elective office from an independent power base. Typically running as singular candidates above politics as usual, reorienting insurgents crash the party system from the outside, hoping to shift the prevailing electoral alignments around a new issue cleavage, perhaps even displacing one of the existing parties from its major party status in the process. As with Theodore Roosevelt’s famous Bull Moose campaign in 1912 and Ross Perot’s surprising independent candidacy in 1992, reorienting insurgents leverage a combination of personalized celebrity status and popular disaffection to alter, though not fully repudiate, regime commitments in the course of their third-party challenge. Though both major historical examples

¹⁷ Daniel DiSalvo, *Engines of Change: Party Factions in American Politics, 1868-2010* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Rachel Blum, “The Tea Party: A Party within a Party,” (PhD diss, Georgetown, 2016).

¹⁸ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014). But see also the important prior organizational developments in Brian M. Conley, “The Politics of Party Renewal: The ‘Service Party’ and the Origins of the Post-Goldwater Republican Right,” *Studies in American Political Development* 27 (April 2013): 51-67.

left independent party organizations in their wake, neither the Progressive Party nor the Reform Party proved able to outlive their originator's almost cult-like status and make any significant subsequent electoral showings.¹⁹ Nevertheless, scholars have shown that even while such impressive third-party bids fail to secure office, they can still have significant effects on the party system and public policy.²⁰

Reactive insurgencies

Finally, like South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond in 1948 or former Alabama governor George Wallace two decades later, some insurgents take the third-party route in opposition to both the existing party system and the trajectory of the prevailing political regime. Akin to their reorienting counterparts, reactive insurgents typically feel compelled to break from existing partisan arrangements due to the perceived constraints changing coalitions or shifting policy agendas impose on their personal principles, careers, constituencies, or some mixture of all of the above. Deployed particularly in presidential elections, reactive insurgencies often set their sights lower than outright victory, making a gambit to sabotage the prospects of an incumbent or increase their leverage over the eventual victor by acting as a spoiler in the electoral college. While even this eventuality is remote, scholars have noted the pronounced effects reactive

¹⁹ Sidney M. Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Andrew E. Busch, *Outsiders and Openness in the Presidential Nomination System* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 153-55; John C. Green and William Binning, "The Rise and Decline of the Reform Party, 1992-2000," in *Multiparty Politics in America*, 2nd Edition, eds, Paul S. Herrnson, and John C. Green (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 99-124.

²⁰ Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, *Third Parties in America*; Ronald B. Rapoport and Walter J. Stone, *Three's a Crowd: The Dynamic of Third Parties, Ross Perot, and the Republican Resurgence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

insurgents can have on recomposing electoral coalitions and transforming party ideologies, even if they are not the primary beneficiaries.²¹

Historically, insurgents have made distinct kinds of politics depending on their relationship to the existing political parties and the regime they encounter or rise up against. All insurgencies are rooted in dissatisfaction and aim to disrupt politics as usual. But the way they do so differs significantly from case to case, with important implications for the developmental effects they have on party organization, ideology, and public policy.

Unfortunately, due to limits of space, a thorough and systematic comparative analysis of the full variety of insurgent politics necessarily falls outside the scope of this article. However, in what follows, I attempt to show the utility of the framework outlined above by illustrating one specific category of insurgent politics: *reconstructive insurgent movements*. I do so for several reasons. First, reconstructive insurgencies are the least familiar kind of insurgency and it is important to establish it as a viable type. Second, despite their unfamiliarity, reconstructive insurgents arguably have the most significant developmental effects on party organization due to the institutional changes they leave in their wake. Finally, the comparison of US and British cases suggests that the framework presented here has applications that reach beyond the American context, if still primary to predominantly two-party systems. Before delving into the particular cases, however, I will elaborate on the origins, dynamics, and developmental effects of reconstructive insurgencies.

²¹ Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Kari Friedrichson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

TWO-PARTY SYSTEMS, REGIME CRISES, AND RECONSTRUCTIVE INSURGENCIES

As scholars of contentious politics have rightly emphasized, institutions play a critical role in structuring opportunities and constraints for collective actors to exert influence on elites. For would-be insurgent movements in the US and UK, few constraints are as significant as the two-party system. In the US, where two-partism extends almost uniformly across the states as well as from the national to the state and local levels, insurgents face myriad obstacles to directly accessing public power by launching their own party, including restrictive ballot access laws, single-member plurality districts, the electoral college, lack of media attention, and deep-seated partisan loyalties. In the UK, also a first-past-the-post electoral system, two-partism has had a more checkered history since the mid-1970s with the emergence of regionalized electoral competitors such as the Scottish National Party and the UK Independence Party.²² Nevertheless, while the effective number of legislative parties in the British Parliament has experience some fluctuation over recent decades as the central state has devolved some significant powers, two-partism has remained the dominant pattern of UK and US national politics alike.²³

Two-partism exerts significant pressure on would-be insurgent movements to channel their political grievances inside one of the existing major parties. The problem is, however, that while two-party systems create significant barriers to third-party entry, boring from within has its own set of disadvantages and dilemmas. Party organizations may be more or less permeable, more or less inclusive, more or less disciplined, and more or less internally democratic. Internal

²² Paul Webb, "Political Parties in Britain: Secular Decline or Adaptive Resilience?" in *Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, eds, Paul Webb, David Farrell, and Ian Holliday (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17, Table 2.1.

²³ Thomas Quinn, "From Two-Partism to Alternating Predominance: The Changing UK Party System, 1950-2010," *Political Studies* 61 (2013): 378-400; Pradeep K. Chhibber and Ken Kollman, *The Formation of National Party Systems: Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

party procedures and traditions matter a great deal in structuring the rules of the game insurgents must play if they want to gain a foothold inside an existing major party. And very often, those institutions present less than hospitable conditions for newcomers to exert significant influence.

What is an insurgent political group to do? To enter and gain influence within an existing major party under this mix of opportunities and constraints, reconstructive insurgents seek to purposefully transform the party as an institution. These insurgent movements, while driven by a mixture of short-term electoral calculations and longer-term policy agendas, are defined by an entrepreneurial project to rewrite party rules and procedures in ways that redistribute relations of authority to give insurgents greater voice in shaping party identity and setting policy priorities. To be sure, like all movements, intraparty insurgencies are composed of a heterogeneous set of actors, some of whom emphasize short-term goals, others who envision large-scale transformations that necessarily unfold along a different time horizon.²⁴ What is important to emphasize though is that, whatever their differences, under specific conditions this diverse range of insurgent actors unite around the shared goal of restructuring the party apparatus to achieve their ends. Thus, while there may well be a variety of identifiable personal and group agendas within the insurgency, their common interest in party reconstruction justifies characterizing them as a movement.

But if reconstructive insurgents are able to transform the party in ways that increase their political opportunities, how do they get the upper hand to initiate reform in the first place? After all, presumably all insurgents would prefer to tilt the playing field to their advantage. Yet most do not or are unable to. Under what circumstances do insurgent movements gain institution-transforming leverage? As the two cases examined below will show, movement activists were successful at transforming parties when they framed their reform projects as fundamentally in

²⁴ See Miroff, "Movement Activists and Partisan Insurgents," 93.

line with specific sets of institutions, policies, and ideas of the postwar political regime at a moment when that order was in crisis. Scholars have explained regime instability as the result of increasing statism or the “intercurrence” of multiple orders operating in tension with each other.²⁵ In the particular cases examined here, it was the successful development of the postwar order that laid the conditions for its own demise. In both the US in the late 1960s and the UK in the 1970s, tensions that had always been present within their respective postwar political regimes became unmanageable. The collapse of party elites’ legitimacy due to their inability to resolve a regime-level crisis cast doubt on the mechanisms of legitimation themselves: party leadership selection structures and mechanisms of officeholder accountability. When coupled with voter disaffection and electoral losses, party elites’ previously unchallenged leadership status fell apart. Amidst the crisis of authority, movement activists had a window of opportunity to influence debate and discussion and promote party reform as a persuasive alternative. A sharp legitimacy crisis for the prevailing constellation of rules, practices, institutions, and ideas then is a necessary though not sufficient condition for the emergence of reconstructive insurgencies.

Insurgents’ entrepreneurialism was especially effective when activists framed their reform agenda as revitalizing the party’s core traditions and regime commitments from which the old guard had allegedly strayed. To be clear, when insurgent movement actors cast themselves as party revitalizers they did so on very selective terms. They often proposed radical solutions to regime-level problems – no doubt contributing to the opposition their transformative projects eventually encountered. Nevertheless, the basis of reformers’ transformative vision was rooted in specific developmental patterns of the postwar political order. Rather than replacing one order with another, reformers claimed their projects to be continuous with democratizing trends

²⁵ David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63-6; Orren and Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development*, 108-18.

present in the declining regime. This is partly what made their claims gain such traction and initially made them so difficult for reform opponents to refute. Reformers molded their claims around retaining – indeed, deepening – these democratizing regime elements while discarding retrograde elements, thus plausibly resolving the crisis.²⁶

However, in neither the US nor the UK were party reformers unopposed when advancing their transformative political projects. Unsurprisingly, reformers on both sides of the Atlantic found that reconstructing authority relations within major parties raised objections and counter-mobilizations from a range of stakeholders in the old patterns of party governance. While the regime crisis and the delegitimation of the party leadership had shifted the playing field in reformers' favor, such advantages were fleeting and highly conditional on factors outside reformers' control. In both instances, on the heels of electoral defeat, counter-reformers effectively marginalized most of the insurgent forces and blocked the consolidation of their reconstructive projects.

Importantly, while counter-reformers blunted and eventually routed aspects of the insurgent movements, the former did not have the option of simply turning back the clock to the status quo ante. Although neither insurgency succeeded in fully transforming their respective parties as they would have liked, the reform measures that had been successfully implemented proved very difficult to reverse. Party reform proved to be a genie that was too difficult to put back into the bottle. Instead, counter-reformers effectively become reformers themselves, basing their own counter-insurgent projects on introducing further rule changes and new institutional

²⁶ See David Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal in the United States, 1968-1972," *Studies in American Political Development* 10 (1996): 223-88.

arrangements to weaken their opponents, even while branding their efforts as continuous with the reformers' democratizing thrust.²⁷

Thus, while reconstructive insurgents failed to score major electoral wins, their limited reform victories did in fact reconstruct the basis of party politics, setting in motion institutional dynamics that have continued to affect the shape of American and British politics today. Indeed, without the lasting effects of these insurgencies and counter-insurgencies, the success of figures like Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, or Jeremy Corbyn would be difficult to imagine. However, unlike in parties that have been host to co-optive insurgencies, such as the Republican Party, procedural conflict and rule changes have become a relatively normalized affair in Democratic and Labour Party politics. As the following cases will demonstrate, this curious result can be explained by politics past insurgents have made.

“THE CURE FOR THE ILLS OF DEMOCRACY”: THE NEW POLITICS MOVEMENT IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The rise of the New Politics reform movement and its impact on the structure and operation of the Democratic Party occurred within and was conditioned by the breakdown of the New Deal order. That regime, which emerged and was consolidated over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, encompassed national state activism in the domestic and international political economy, Cold War foreign policy, and the development of a two-tiered public-private welfare state. Politically, the regime rested on a tripartite coalition of northern labor-liberals, urban machines, and the

²⁷ I recognize the terminological and conceptual difficulty of characterizing counter-reformers as reformers in this instance, especially given that those I call “counter-reformers,” such as the Clintonite New Democrats and Tony Blair’s New Labour, have a well-known reputation as party reformers, revisionists, and modernizers. However, despite its lack of elegance, I maintain this distinction because it is critical to note that those opposed to the insurgents and their reforms (that is, counter-reformers or counter-insurgents) consciously adopted the mantle of reform in their quest to weaken the influence of their insurgent opponents and reshape their parties in their own image.

authoritarian enclaves of the Jim Crow South.²⁸ New Deal state-building, economic restructuring, wartime antifascism, and postwar anticommunism contributed to a powerful democratizing thrust within the Democratic order, eventually straining the terms of alliance between northern race liberals and laborites on the one hand and southern anti-union racial conservatives on the other.²⁹

During the early postwar decades, these latent contradictions within the New Deal order had been contained in part by the decentralized structure of the Democratic Party's confederal national organization. While the quadrennial National Convention was the highest formal authority in the party, state Democratic parties were free to pass their own resolutions and approve their own platforms regardless of national party policy. Indeed, when this freedom of maneuver was challenged at the 1948 Philadelphia Convention by a strongly worded civil rights platform plank, members of some southern delegations staged a walkout in protest and launched a rival Dixiecrat third party led by Strom Thurmond. As V. O. Key observed at the time, "a basic doctrine of the Dixiecrat rebellion was that the Democratic party of each state was an independent entity, not bound by the actions of the national convention."³⁰ In the aftermath of their revolt, Dixiecrat rebels faced few reprisals by party leaders, and national Democratic elites spent the next decade trying to appease the South by walking back the national platform's commitment to civil rights.³¹

While National Convention flare-ups were avoided throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the foundations of the New Deal order continued to erode at the grassroots level as its liberal

²⁸ Robert Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

²⁹ Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Schickler, *Racial Realignment*.

³⁰ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984 [1949]), 394.

³¹ Boris Heersink, "Party Leaders and Electoral Realignment: Democratic and Republican Southern Strategies, 1948-1968," *The Forum* 15 (2017): 631-53.

democratic and racially conservative bases came into direct conflict. As the civil rights movement revived in the 1960s with the sit-ins, the March on Washington, and Freedom Summer, tensions in the Democratic Party reemerged on full display when the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) mounted a credentials challenge against the all-white Mississippi delegation in the midst of the 1964 Atlantic City Democratic National Convention. The MFDP and its allies challenged the convention to employ its nominally supreme authority to reconcile the discrepancy between its national policy priorities (President Lyndon Johnson had signed the Civil Rights Act into law only weeks before) and the racially discriminatory practices of one of its subnational units. As John Roche, chairman of the liberal advocacy organization Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), stated in a letter sent to state Democratic chairs, “support of the Freedom Democratic Party will be consistent with the principles of the platforms adopted for many years by the Democratic National Conventions. . . . The seating of the Freedom Democratic Party delegation in 1964 will make the Party’s position clear and will strengthen its claim to the votes of all who recognize the drive for full equality as the great moral issue facing America today.”³²

Though the MFDP challenge was unsuccessful in unseating the Mississippi regulars, the convention resolved that for future conventions voters in each state would be granted the right to “participate fully in party affairs” irrespective of their “race, color, creed or national origin.” The party’s Special Equal Rights Committee, struck in the aftermath of the Atlantic City compromise,

³² Memo from National Chairman John P. Roche to State Party Chairs, 13 June 1964, Box 28, Folder: Democratic National Convention – 1964, Americans for Democratic Action Records, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

warned that “failure on the part of a state delegation to meet this requirement could lead to the sitting of another delegation.”³³

As the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts began the democratization of southern party-states in earnest, additional fractures developed within the New Deal order as the escalating war in Vietnam became an issue of contention within the labor-liberal community, which had up to that point successfully married democratic-egalitarian values to an aggressive anticommunist foreign policy. Before long, President Johnson faced increasing public criticism, vocal protest movements, and, by 1968, insurgent primary challenges from senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, eventually forcing Johnson from the race.

Johnson’s withdrawal, however, proved a hollow victory for antiwarriors. While McCarthy and Kennedy had scored impressive victories in the seventeen primaries held that year, Vice President Hubert Humphrey (a defender of Johnson’s foreign policy) held a majority of convention delegates despite not having entered a single primary contest. Moreover, while trying to bore from within, antiwar insurgents had encountered a number of procedural obstacles, arbitrary rules applications, onerous filing fees, and outright exclusion in many caucus and convention states. Frustrated activists from both insurgent campaigns catalogued their grievances in a report entitled *The Democratic Choice*, distributed to the delegates of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Beyond documenting what they saw as the inequities of the presidential nominating system, the authors couched their objections within the wider context of the “break-up of the New Deal coalition.” Amidst the mobilization of new social forces, new political cleavages, and the unraveling of the postwar order, the insurgents articulated the need for democratization and party revitalization: “State systems for the selecting of delegates to the

³³ DNC Resolution, quoted in Special Equal Rights Committee Chair Richard J. Hughes to William L. Taylor, US Commission for Civil Rights, Box 44, Folder: 1968 Democratic Convention Credentials Committee, James O’Hara Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

National Convention and the procedures of the Convention itself display considerably less fidelity to basic democratic principles than a nation which claims to govern itself can safely tolerate.”³⁴

As insurgent activists drew on the language of the Atlantic City compromise of 1964 and indicted the undemocratic operation of the convention through a record number of official credentials challenges, riot police and protesters clashed in the streets of Chicago, suggesting to the many millions who watched the televised footage at home that the Democratic Party was at risk of falling apart. As Humphrey bleakly observed, it was as if “the whole environment of politics had come apart.”³⁵ Inside the convention hall, a majority of delegates nominated Vice President Humphrey and approved a hawkish party platform over the objections of liberal doves. Delegates also narrowly passed a resolution in response to *The Democratic Choice*, calling on the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to create an official reform commission to investigate claims concerning the delegate selection procedures and issue recommendations for consideration before the next national convention.

Humphrey’s narrow loss to Richard Nixon in November opened further opportunities for movement insurgents to press for drastic alterations in the structure and operation of the Democratic Party. After the divisive nomination process, the disaster of the Chicago convention, and then the bitter loss in the general election, few could deny that the party was in need of some form of revitalization. Armed with the mandate of the convention resolution, movement activists from the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns and their allies in groups like the ADA, the United Auto Workers (UAW), the New Democratic Coalition (NDC), and the National Women’s

³⁴ *The Democratic Choice: A Report of the Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential Nominees*, Box 157, Folder: Democratic National Committee – Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, George McGovern Papers, Seely G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

³⁵ Quoted in David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 204.

Political Caucus (NWPC) agitated for the creation of a reform commission, organized in support of its activities, influenced its deliberations, and helped implement its recommendations.³⁶

In early 1970, the McGovern-Fraser commission (known for its two successive chairmen, South Dakota senator George McGovern and Minnesota representative Donald Fraser) issued a binding set of delegate selection guidelines that dramatically curtailed the ability of party elites to marginalize or exclude insurgent voices as they had in the 1968 nomination contest. However, beyond merely ameliorating recent grievances, many members of the reform commission and their outside supporters saw themselves as remaking the party itself. As Fraser put it: “political parties need to be reasonable, disciplined organizations even though there needs to be free entry into the party, and an opportunity for insurgency.”³⁷ Indeed, beyond entry, the report included stringent affirmative action guidelines meant to “overcome the effects of past discrimination” by requiring the representation of “minority groups, young people, and women in reasonable relationship to their presence in the population of the state.”³⁸ Furthermore, the McGovern-Fraser guidelines stripped Democratic officeholders and state party officials of their automatic delegate status that they had enjoyed as state party guests at the National Convention. Under the new rules, if Democratic officials and officeholders wanted to attend the National Convention they would have to run for delegate election in their home district and publicly commit themselves to a particular presidential candidate, drastically curtailing their ability to engage in traditional brokerage politics in the fabled smoke-filled rooms of the Convention Hall.

³⁶ Detailed accounts of this process can be found in Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*; and Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*.

³⁷ Memo from Donald Fraser to Dave, 27 March 1972, Box 149.C.14.2F, Folder: Miscellaneous Packet II, Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota History Center, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

³⁸ Mandate for Reform: The Report of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, Box 157, Folder: Mandate for Reform, McGovern Papers.

By 1972, the effect of the reforms in combination with the presidential candidacy of McGovern was evident in the composition of the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach: the share of African American delegates increased from 7 percent in 1968 to 15 percent in 1972; women delegates increased from 13 to 40 percent; and people under the age of thirty increased from 4 to 22 percent. Moreover, those with annual incomes of \$10,000 or less (70 percent of the country according to the 1970 census) increased from 11 to 27 percent. An unprecedented 83 percent of delegates were first-time participants. Overall, the number of participants involved in the nomination process of the Democratic Party more than doubled from 8.4 million in 1968 to 17.5 million in 1972. Two political scientists concluded that “compared to the total population, the 1972 convention was in most respects more representative than was the 1968 convention.”³⁹

The recomposition of National Convention was also reflected in the Democratic platform, drafted through a new, more open and participatory process, involving a massively expanded 150-person committee with members hailing from the NWPC, the ADA, the NDC, the United Farm Workers, Common Cause, and the Gay Activist Alliance. The product of their deliberations was a document that envisioned revitalizing the egalitarian elements of the New Deal order while jettisoning its Cold War foreign policy commitments and its exclusionary racial and gendered practices. On the one hand, the platform defined “full employment – a guaranteed job for all” as “the primary economic objective of the Democratic Party” – a provision the *New York Times* described as “a return to the initial thrust of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal.”⁴⁰

³⁹ John W. Soule and Wilma E. McGrath, “A Comparative Study of Presidential Nominating Conventions: The Democrats 1968 and 1972,” *American Journal of Political Science* 19 (1975), 502. The demographic and participant figures are taken from the CBS News Report, “The Delegates of ’72,” Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party; Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973–November 1974, O’Hara Collection; and (using DNC data) William Crotty, *Party Reform* (New York: Longman, 1983), 129, 131.

⁴⁰ Democratic Party Platform of 1972, available at www.presidency.ecsb.edu; “Shaping the Democratic Platform,” *New York Times*, 2 July 1972.

Moreover, it announced the need to “reorder” US institutions so that women, African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, the young and the old “can participate in the decisionmaking process inherent in our democratic heritage.” On the other hand, the platform also promised “as a first order of business, an immediate and complete withdrawal of all US forces from Indochina,” and to relocate an appropriate share of the “real decisions on war and peace” from the presidency to Congress.⁴¹

New Politics reformers also set their sights on more ambitious changes to the party structure beyond opening the presidential nominating process to grassroots participation. As one internal commission report noted, “Making the party ‘open’ is only a first step ... for even if the doors of the party are opened wider to the grass roots, it is not at all certain that the grass roots will rush in to seize the opportunity.”⁴² For many reformers, lack of grassroots participation was not only due to the procedural barriers of the kind that antiwar activists encountered in 1968, but even more so because of the programmatic incoherence of the New Deal coalition. Political parties, they argued, were unable to function as popular mechanisms of responsive government when their weak, decentralized structures encompassed irreconcilable political blocs between racial liberals and Jim Crow segregationists or between cold warriors and liberal doves. Such coalitional tensions, and the organizational structures that gave rise to them, discouraged widespread participation as coalition-splitting issues were papered over and the winning of office was prioritized over addressing citizens’ most pressing policy concerns. From the perspective of

⁴¹ Democratic Party Platform of 1972.

⁴² Report of the Grass Roots Participation Subcommittee, 22 August 1969, Box 149.C.12.3B, Folder: Democratic Party Reform, 1969, Fraser Papers.

some leaders of the New Politics movement, overcoming these internal party cleavages required a “fundamental reshaping of the Democratic Party.”⁴³

The reformers’ effort to reshape the party was encapsulated in their proposal for the Democrats’ first-ever party constitution, the Charter for the Democratic Party of the United States. The Charter’s stated aim was to reorganize the national party “to permit more direct participation by members in national party policy-making” by “adding a new dimension of grassroots interest to complement that of state organizations and elected officials,” thereby “bringing new vitality to the party as a whole.”⁴⁴ This was to be accomplished by introducing seven regional party committee organizations to interface between national and state levels, which would hold “mini-conferences” in odd-numbered years that would bring together party officials, officeholders, and rank-and-file party members to promote organization, education, and training while also formulating policy recommendations for the national party. These meetings would feed into national policy conferences held in even-numbered years between presidential nominating conventions, where delegates of party stakeholders could address issues of national policy and elect a national committee chair without the added pressure of selecting a presidential nominee. These “mini-conventions,” it was imagined, would function as “a transmission belt between movement politics and party politics. ...[Providing] a way that movement people ... could register themselves in the Democratic Party in an organized, relatively coherent and legitimate way.”⁴⁵

⁴³ See the Transcription of the Joint Meeting between McGovern-Fraser and O’Hara commissions, November 1971, Box 149.C.14.2F, Folder: Committee Notebook, Fraser Papers.

⁴⁴ Charter Proposal, Box 44, Folder: Democratic Party, O’Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 2, O’Hara Collection.

⁴⁵ Thomas E. Cronin, “On the American Presidency: A Conversation with James MacGregor Burns,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 16 (1986), 536.

At the apex of the party, the Charter proposed recomposing the Democratic National Committee to include all 310 members of the seven regional committees, while a DNC Executive Council of twenty-two would oversee day-to-day organizational responsibilities. The Executive would include the ranking party leaders from the House of Representatives and Senate to facilitate greater coordination between the party organization and the party in government. The added expenses associated with such a revamped party structure would be partially offset by a dues-based annual membership enrollment program, alleviating somewhat the party's fundraising reliance on "fat cat contributors."⁴⁶

However, the Charter's aim to transform the decentralized power structure of the party helped galvanize a formidable anti-reform backlash. While the delegate selection reforms had asserted national party authority over state organizations as never before, it had left the state organizations in place as the constituent units of the national party. In proposing a new regional substructure between state and national organizations, the Charter threatened the power of the state party leaders in a way delegate selection restructuring had not. Consequently, in the face of internal party turmoil over the controversial McGovern nomination, the Charter was not submitted for approval to the 1972 Convention in Miami Beach as initially planned, but was instead proposed as the subject of study for a new post-election reform commission.

This sequence of events proved to be of major consequence for the New Politics reform movement. McGovern's landslide defeat in the 1972 presidential election quickly closed the window of opportunity opened to reformers in the aftermath of the 1968 crisis, demoralizing activists within the already dissipating social movements while also providing anti-reformers with a compelling rationale to counter the reform project as a whole. Organized under the banner

⁴⁶ Transcript of Interview with Donald Fraser, 9 August 1972, Box 149.G.11.10F, Folder: Draft of Interview with Fraser with Jim and Eric Nathanson, Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota History Center, St. Paul, Minnesota.

of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), counter-reformers mounted a public campaign against the New Politics movement's influence in the party and mobilized formidable blocs within the new reform commissions undertaking the making of the party Charter. Drawing together a coalition of officeholders and their aides, foreign policy hawks, neoconservative intellectuals, and anti-reform party scholars and labor leaders, the CDM argued that the Democrats' defeat in the presidential election was a result of McGovern-Fraser's "bias toward 'participatory' over 'representative' democracy," which resulted in the "over-representation" of activists of the "so-called grassroots" through the use of affirmative action quotas.⁴⁷ Moreover, the reformers' proposal for a new party constitution aimed to "centralize, ideologize, and 'Europeanize' the party" in ways the CDM argued ran counter to American political culture, and its deliberative policymaking venues would "probably be unrepresentative and divisive," and thus further "harm the party's electoral appeal."⁴⁸

Coming in the wake of electoral disaster, these criticisms proved persuasive when circulated as full-page ads in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as in popular publications such as *Commentary Magazine*, and when CDM members within the halls of Congress and the National Governors Conference distributed these items and lobbied for their approval. Ironically, the CDM did not simply call for the restoration of the status quo ante of the pre-McGovern-Fraser Democratic Party. In a shrewd strategic move, CDM members accepted the mantle of reform and utilized the lingering momentum of the reform project to steer the Charter Commission's deliberations toward constitutionalizing the loose, confederal party

⁴⁷ CDM Press Release, "CDM Calls for Changes in McGovern-Fraser Guidelines," 26 April 1973, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.

⁴⁸ Coalition for a Democratic Majority, *Unity Out of Diversity*, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Papers on Party Charter, O'Hara Collection; Press Release, "CDM Proposes Broad New Charter for Democratic Party," 22 July 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, Correspondence, November 1972 – September 1973, O'Hara Collection.

structure they preferred. As one CDM publication asked, “Why shouldn’t those of us who want to replace the de facto quota system enacted in 1971 with a truly democratic and open process of electing delegates now be entitled to be considered the ‘reformers’?”⁴⁹ In the course of events, the coalition of counter-reformers successfully diluted the assertiveness of the affirmative action provisions in the McGovern-Fraser guidelines, torpedoed the Charter’s proposed regional substructure and mass-membership program, and modified the midterm policy conference from being mandatory to being optional, leaving it to the discretion of the DNC, which eventually shelved the institution in the early 1980s. As the compromised Charter – first proposed by reformers but refashioned by the CDM – was ratified by a special party conference in December 1974, counter-reformers reported that “our view has prevailed,” and that the party’s first-ever constitution institutionalized “the peculiarly limited roles and duties of an American-style national political party.”⁵⁰

Notwithstanding this pivotal turn in the course of party reform, as the 1980s delivered successive landslide losses for Democratic presidential nominees, some party insiders continued to point the finger at the lingering influence of the New Politics movement and argued that not enough had been done to undo what they considered to be the damage they had done to the national party organization and its public image. Organized first as the House Democratic Caucus’s Committee on Party Effectiveness, then later as the independent Democratic Leadership Council, a contingent of moderate to conservative southern Democratic officeholders and officials sought to diminish the influence of the party’s activist base by reasserting the power

⁴⁹ *CDM Notes*, October 1974, Box 48, Folder: Democratic Party, Coalition for a Democratic Majority, October 1973 – November 1974, O’Hara Collection.

⁵⁰ “Resolution on the Charter,” Box 47, Folder: Democratic Party Charter Commission, Drafts and Background Material, O’Hara Collection; Penn Kemble and Josh Muravchik, “Balancing the Democrats,” *The New Leader*, 20 January 1975.

of elected officeholders in the party.⁵¹ While the proto-New Democrats' campaign focused on articulating a new public philosophy based on an interventionist foreign policy, market-based administration, and a general de-emphasis of controversial social issues, they also proposed new procedural reforms intended to restore the influence of party officials and officeholders in the process of candidate selection. Louisiana representative Gillis Long and his aide Al From introduced the recommendation for the superdelegate category to the post-1980 Democratic Party Commission on Presidential Nomination "to temper the influence of interest group leaders and party activists in the nominating process."⁵² The logic behind the proposal was that the party's recent string of defeats was a result of the inability of experienced party leaders to exert any peer review over the choice of presidential nominee in the post-reform era. Superdelegates, which reserved a large proportion of convention votes (historically, up to as much as about 20 percent) for current and former party leaders, officeholders, as well as the entire DNC, would draw responsible party voices back into the process, requiring aspirants to moderate their stances to not only appeal to the activists in the primary electorate but also to court the party elites in the convention.

Further, given their powerbase in the South, New Democrats also orchestrated scheduling changes in the presidential nomination calendar, clustering a group of southern primaries in what became known as Super Tuesday to provide one of their own with an advantage in the presidential nominating contest. This plan, however, ultimately backfired by the presidential

⁵¹ On the New Democrats, see Jon F. Hale, "The Making of the New Democrats," *Political Science Quarterly* 110 (1995): 207-32; Stephen K. Medvic, "Old Democrats in New Clothing? An Ideological Analysis of a Democratic Party Faction," *Party Politics*, 13 (2007): 587-609; Daniel DiSalvo, "The Death and Life of the New Democrats," *The Forum* 6 (2008): 1-18; and Curtis Atkins, "Forging a New Democratic Party: The Politics of the Third Way from Clinton to Obama" (PhD diss., York University, 2015).

⁵² Al From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43. See also, Kenneth S. Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 39.

candidacy of Jesse Jackson in 1988, when African American turnout in southern states delivered an unexpected showing for Jackson over his DLC counterparts.

This setback notwithstanding, the long awaited return of the Democrats to the White House in 1993 with a ticket headed by two DLC members seemed to signal the New Democrats' success as a new insurgent faction within the party. Given their deliberate attempts to alter party procedure to accomplish their factional project, were the New Democrats simply a more successful version of the New Politics insurgency? There are several reasons to think not. First, by their own admission, New Democrats' rule changes – including the advent of superdelegates as well as the creation of Super Tuesday – were relatively less instrumental to their takeover of the party when compared to the changes engineered by the New Politics movement.⁵³ On the contrary, their own negative assessment of their ability to gain sufficient leverage from their reforms compelled New Democrats to shift from a reconstructive approach to one resembling a co-optive insurgent strategy. Second, and more importantly, rather than representing a stand alone case of a reconstructive insurgency, the case of the New Democrats reflects the degree to which New Politics reformers had, in fact, shifted the terrain of political contestation inside the party. New Democrats' ultimately unsuccessful attempt to reconstruct the party illustrates just how embedded the dynamics of reform had become since McGovern-Fraser and the counter-reforms of the CDM, portending new rounds of intraparty conflict that would call into question the legitimacy of party rules as a matter of routine.

In sum, reformers inside the New Politics movement failed to consolidate their vision for a nationally integrated, mass-based, participatory organization before they were frustrated by the CDM and, later, displaced by the DLC. Yet, despite the limits of their success, the insurgents did have major lasting effects on the structure and outcomes of the US presidential nominating

⁵³ Baer, *Reinventing Democrats*, 58-60.

process. While no comparable reform movement formed inside the GOP, legislative changes necessary to implement the Democrats' increasing reliance on primaries exerted effects on the Republican Party as well, opening the party up to greater influence from their activist base.⁵⁴ Moreover, the New Politics movement's brief hold on power institutionalized a reformist political dynamic that continues to shape the Democratic Party today, as I will discuss in the conclusion below.

“BETWEEN AGITATION AND LOYALTY”: THE BRITISH NEW LEFT AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR LABOUR PARTY DEMOCRACY

Just as with the New Politics movement in the US, the rise of the New Left inside the British Labour Party developed in the context of, and in response to, the unravelling of a postwar political order in which Labour had played a lead role in constructing.⁵⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the Atlee governments had initiated a major expansion of domestic welfare state building, including the establishment of new social services such as the National Health Service, and the implementation of a range of policies to promote high and stable employment levels, restore economic growth, and redistribute the costs and benefits of the mixed economy equitably throughout society while the country transitioned from war to peacetime. In foreign relations, the British state joined in and facilitated the reconstruction of a liberal international order under the aegis of American leadership, complete with formal military alliances, economic treaties, and nuclear deterrents to contain the influence of the Soviet Union.

⁵⁴ See Baylor, *First to the Party*, 156-72.

⁵⁵ See especially Patrick Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 18-36; Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour* (London: Verso, 2001), 16-38; and Meg Russell, *Building New Labour: The Politics of Organizational Change* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 13-5.

Unlike the Democrats, however, the Labour Party had been formed on the basis of the British trade union movement and explicitly defined itself as representing the interests of the working class, broadly understood. Accordingly, since the 1918 drafting of Labour's constitution, affiliated trade unions were given formal recognition and privileged voting rights in the party's main deliberative structures: the annual party conference; and its elected administrative body, the National Executive Council (NEC). The unions' ability to cast block votes ensured the largest unions and their leaders effective control of resolutions debated and voted upon at Conference. However, the exact implications of conference decision-making on the actions of the parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) were always ambiguous and became on occasion the axis of internal party dissension over controversial issues such as public ownership of the means of production, nuclear disarmament, and the UK's relationship to the European Common Market. While the party constitution formally recognized the conference as sovereign in developing party policy, the NEC had over time come to play a forceful role in leading the conference in its decision-making processes, taking the initiative in forming, proposing, debating, and passing resolutions.⁵⁶ Moreover, Labour MPs and Cabinet members had from the start been protective of their autonomy in issues of policymaking and governance, eager as they were to establish a firm basis for reelection and forming a parliamentary majority. This meant that in practice the PLP, while never explicitly denying conference sovereignty, exercised *de facto* discretion and flexibility in relationship to the extra-parliamentary party.

After a long period spent in opposition from 1951 to 1964, Labour returned to government in 1964 and 1966 under Harold Wilson and came back to power determined to modernize Labour's image and avoid another string of political defeats. At the core of Labour's

⁵⁶ Lewis Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference: A Study in the Politics of Intra-Party Democracy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 4-6, 11.

modernization program was the Wilson government's intention to prove its competency as a natural party of government. Practically, however, this translated into the adoption of an austere policy of wage freezes and macroeconomic restraint to cope with a mounting currency crisis, rising inflation, and increasingly frequent wildcat strikes. Claims to competency notwithstanding, Wilson's efforts to enlist the unions in applying industrial discipline failed as union leaders balked at what they considered to be "repressive legislation" aimed at curtailing their fundamental right to strike, even if it was coming from a Labour Cabinet.⁵⁷ Wilson's repudiation at the hands of the unions undermined the government's reputation in the electorate. Indeed, the 1970 general elections saw large working-class voter defections from Labour as the party went down to a surprising defeat.⁵⁸

More than simply a personal failing, Wilson's humiliation at the hands of the unions reflected the structural tensions at the foundation of the postwar social democratic order and telegraphed the regime crisis to come. At its root was the intractable dilemma caused by the maturity of the full employment mixed economy: as tightened labor markets and wage increases squeezed profits, firms responded by passing the increasing costs onto consumers, who in turn made further wage demands, creating a wage-cost inflationary spiral.⁵⁹ Moreover, government attempts to control inflation through austerity policies tended to exacerbate official and unofficial forms of industrial militancy, which in turn were often settled by further wage increases. Indeed, "despite torturous government efforts to hold down wages, [there] was an average increase in

⁵⁷ James E. Cronin, *New Labour's Pasts: The Labour Party and its Discontents* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), 104.

⁵⁸ Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 18.

⁵⁹ Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism Unleashed: Finance, Globalization, and Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-8.

real wages of nearly two-thirds between 1968 and 1972.”⁶⁰ Thus, the very success of the social-democratic regime in postwar Britain destabilized the conditions for its own continuation.

The political-economic crisis of the postwar order and the policy and electoral failures of the Wilson government opened a window of opportunity for new political forces and alternative policies germinating throughout the 1960s. As the rise in industrial militancy made clear, the emergence of the British New Left presented a challenge to recognized forms of authority across society, from the trade unions to the campuses to the streets. What Ralph Miliband at the time called a spirit of “de-subordination” had become increasingly evident in the UK, and began leaching into Labour’s extra-parliamentary party through dissident unions and the local constituency party organizations.⁶¹ It was in recognition of this new radicalism, as well as the failures of postwar Labour governments, that Labour MP Tony Benn articulated the necessity for a “new politics,” which must develop “between the new structure of issue politics and the political parties.”⁶² While many activists in the broad New Left aimed their criticisms at Labour, Benn pointed to the possibility of transforming the party itself. “The Labour Party is uniquely fitted to understand that modern democracy requires a revitalization and reformulation. ... It must necessarily follow that the way in which it approaches [this] task, the nature of its own organization and its own leadership role could also be altered.”⁶³

Benn was far from alone in looking to the Labour Party as a potential vehicle for developing a resolution to the crisis. Indeed, the party’s traditional socialist commitments as well as its principle of conference sovereignty acted as a positive draw for many newly mobilized movement actors. In addition to Benn, Michael Foot, Ian Mikardo, Judith Hart and others drew

⁶⁰ Cronin, *New Labour’s Pasts*, 107.

⁶¹ Miliband, quoted in Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 7.

⁶² Anthony Wedgewood Benn, *The New Politics: A Socialist Reconnaissance*, Fabian Tract 402, 1970, 9, available at <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk>.

⁶³ Benn, *The New Politics*, 12, 27.

on existing movement organizing to mobilize a widespread intraparty campaign – not only for new policies, but for new means of carrying them out. The New Left in the Labour Party also received support from many trade union leaders, who were bitter about the confrontations with the Wilson governments, as well as many prominent party officials, skilled in the translation of the New Left's radical proposals into policy briefs and formal resolutions.

These forces pushing for a radical shift in the direction of the Labour Party came together in the National Executive Council, especially in its struggle to articulate a new alternative economic strategy to fill the policy vacuum that had resulted from the crisis. The product, *Labour's Programme 1973*, set out an ambitious agenda for the next Labour government, promising to massively extend state intervention into industrial planning by nationalizing the twenty-five largest domestic firms, implementing a system of price controls, and enacting substantial increases in social services and pension systems. The trade unions were assigned a lead role in a proposed tripartite system of corporatist planning, and Benn suggested that the likely objections from the Treasury and the business community could be overcome by rapid passage of the entire policy package as an omnibus Industrial Powers Bill.⁶⁴

However, it was not the objections of the business community but the Labour leadership and the PLP that posed the most immediate obstacle to the New Left's program. Despite the program's adoption by the 1973 Conference, Wilson – still party leader – threatened to veto the nationalization proposal (though he backed off such a provocation by simply ignoring the offending provision). Members of the Labour New Left saw that if the crisis of British social democracy was to be resolved, it was not only a matter of innovating new forms of policy; it

⁶⁴ Cronin, *New Labour's Pasts*, 136-8.

would be necessary to confront the structure of power within the party itself.⁶⁵ This primarily took the form of reasserting the sovereignty of the party conference over the PLP.

The impetus behind such a plan became all the more pressing after Labour returned to government in 1974 and ignored the New Left's program, opting instead for a reflationary Keynesianism that exacerbated price instability and slowed economic growth. Ultimately, intervention by the International Monetary Fund imposed a new, stricter financial orthodoxy that only deepened the extent of industrial militancy in the second half of the decade, culminating in the infamous miners' strike and the 1978-1979 "winter of discontent."

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD), which had formed in 1973 in response to Wilson's threatened veto of the nationalization plan, became the main organizational vehicle for the Labour New Left's effort to reconstruct the internal balance of party authority. Working through the local constituency parties and some of the trade unions, as well as with sympathetic Labour MPs, the CLPD organized an insurgent movement around reforming the party's constitution to challenge the authority of the PLP and the leadership's de facto control of party policy. CLPD members announced their intention to "ensure a closer link between Labour Party members and their elected representatives."⁶⁶ The Campaign's first target, mandatory reselection of MPs, and its second, leadership election by the conference rather than the PLP, aimed to build what one CLPD bulletin called the necessary "machinery to ensure that [conference-approved] policy recommendations are acted on."⁶⁷ Accountability of the PLP to the conference could only be assured, they argued, if the threat of deselection or replacement could meaningfully be invoked. Without any such disciplinary capacity, conference sovereignty –

⁶⁵ Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 66-7; Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, 102.

⁶⁶ CLPD, Progress Report 1973, quoted in Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, 84.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 139. A third reform struggle over control of the party manifesto was less successful and will therefore be excluded from this account due to space limitations.

especially when it recommended bold policy initiatives – was largely illusory. “The purpose of mandatory reselection is to establish an open and honest relationship between the MP and his or her constituency party in the hope that, whatever the practicalities of office, our representatives in Parliament are never again allowed to lose sight of the ideal of the movement which sent them there.”⁶⁸ Initially resisted and suppressed by the Conference Arrangements Committee in 1974 and 1975, mandatory reselection was debated and narrowly defeated in 1976 and 1977, eventually passing by a wide margin at the 1979 party conference due to the sustained lobbying efforts of the CLPD in the constituency parties and the unions.⁶⁹

With this hard-fought victory, party reformers opened a second front in the battle over Labour Party democracy, focused on the selection of the party leadership. Traditionally the exclusive prerogative of the PLP, reformers sought to broaden the extent of the franchise for the leadership vote to other stakeholders in the extra-parliamentary party, such as the unions and the constituency parties. In this, the Labour insurgents were assisted by events, particularly the party’s loss in the 1979 general election, which not only saw the ascension of Margaret Thatcher’s order-shattering New Right program to government, but also saw Labour’s vote share fall to a mere 37 percent – its worst share since 1931. These electoral setbacks and the swelling membership of the CLPD suggested a growing perception within the party that Labour was in need of fundamental change.⁷⁰

Constitutional changes to the method of leadership selection had been defeated at the 1979 conference, even as mandatory reselection reforms had finally prevailed. Other constitutional changes approved at the conference, however, allowed new resolutions on

⁶⁸ Quoted in Panitch and Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, 140.

⁶⁹ For details, see Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, 103-12.

⁷⁰ For details on Labour’s electoral decline, see Peter Byrd, “The Labour Party in Britain,” in *The Future of Social Democracy: Problems and Prospects of Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe*, eds, William E. Paterson and Alastair H. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 59-107.

leadership selection to be brought back as soon as the 1980 conference. In the run-up to that meeting, new organizations formed in partnership with the CLPD, such as the Rank and File Mobilizing Committee, which spearheaded a public campaign – including twenty country-wide rallies – to galvanize support for the party reform agenda. No less than fifty resolutions and amendments calling for constitutional reform appeared on the 1980 conference agenda, forty-one of which sprang from the activism of the CLPD.⁷¹ A resolution in favor of extending the franchise passed narrowly, and at a special party conference held the year after an electoral college for the selection of leader and deputy leader was adopted, giving 40 percent of the leadership vote to the unions, 30 percent to the constituency parties, and 30 percent to the PLP. Both the trade unions and the constituency parties could cast their ballots as a block, stoking fears among many in the party that the reforms would empower the party's activist base.

The second major victory of the New Left in the Labour Party proved to be its high watermark, however, as it triggered the split of a splinter group of MPs, who formed the Social Democratic Party (SDP) to fill the vacuum of the political center they felt had been vacated by the Thatcherite Tories and the left-moving Labour Party. By the end of 1981, the SDP has twenty-six Labour MPs and one Conservative MP, although no affiliated trade unions followed. The split in the PLP occasioned a bitter backlash against the New Left by many of the MPs that remained. The heightened tensions within the party found an outlet in Benn's campaign for deputy leader against Denis Healey (Michael Foot had already been elected leader under the old rules). Benn's campaign became for both reformers and their opponents a referendum on the legitimacy of the party's new electoral college and the influence of reformers generally. The New Left saw in Benn's campaign the chance to meaningfully engage the whole party in a debate about Labour Party policy, whereas reform skeptics saw defeating Benn as a means to

⁷¹ Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left*, 117.

prevent further splits and fragmentation in the party. After a long campaign through the summer and early fall of 1981, Benn narrowly lost the fight for deputy leader with 49.6 percent of the vote.

The closeness of the deputy leadership contest sustained bitter personal animosities thereafter, and a polarization between Foot and Benn deepened, which, while resulting in only a small number of formal purges, brought negative media attention and an increasingly hostile internal party environment, pitting intraparty factions against one another. The 1983 general election brought further setbacks as Labour's vote share fell yet again, despite the failures of the Tory government, whose monetarist policies had increased unemployment by 3 million. Critical to Thatcher's electoral success (in 1983 and again in 1987) was the SDP-Liberal Alliance, which siphoned about a quarter of votes from the two major parties, creating an unstable electoral situation.

The reelection of Thatcher promoted a new basis for unity for the various factions in the Labour Party, which all saw her electoral success as auguring the consolidation of a new kind of political regime in the UK that was decidedly unfriendly to trade unionism, nuclear disarmament, and the growth of the welfare state. While the exit of some Labour MPs to the Social Democrats had removed one of the New Left's major internal party critics, and while Thatcher's own order-shattering form of politics made the Labour New Left's policy agenda seem less of a radical departure from the postwar regime, the overall effect of Thatcherism on the Labour Party was to close ranks in the face of a political force that no party faction was prepared to counter. MP Neil Kinnock made a call for unity and a return to normalcy the basis of his leadership campaign when he succeeded Foot just months after the 1983 defeat. The Labour New Left proved

amenable to his calls for party unity, if for more pragmatic reasons than out of genuine conviction.

While he had been a founding member of CLPD, as party leader Kinnock believed the Campaign had achieved its two main organizational goals (mandatory MP reselection and the leadership electoral college) and that it was the right time to return to stability.⁷² To this end, he initiated a new round of party reform designed to improve Labour's media image and its popular appeal by reestablishing parliamentary control over policymaking, centralizing power in the party leader, and reasserting its authority over, and independence from, the party conference. A key player in this counter-reformation of the party organization was the Campaign for Labour Victory (formed in response to success of the CLPD in 1977), which advocated a gradual but decisive dismantling of the electoral college block votes by further reforming the party toward a "one member, one vote" (OMOV) model for leadership and parliamentary candidate selection. Labour's consecutive defeats in the elections of 1987 and 1992 enhanced the voice of CLV leaders, most of whom were parliamentarians, strengthening their calls for reforms that would dilute the voice of the "extremist" CLPD with greater involvement of "ordinary" party members with moderate views.⁷³ Echoing the rhetoric of their US counterparts in the CDM and the DLC, two prominent spokespersons of the proto-New Labourites argued that, "by moving from a system of delegate democracy to a direct democracy, structures must ensure that the party's mass, grassroots membership, *rather than unrepresentative groups of activists*, has the greatest say in the agreement of policies and the election of [the party's] leaders."⁷⁴

⁷² Russell, *Building New Labour*, 40.

⁷³ Russell, *Building New Labour*, 25, 28.

⁷⁴ Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle, quoted in Patrick Seyd, "New Parties/New Politics? A Case Study of the British Labour Party," *Party Politics* 5 (1999), 387 (emphasis added).

Occurring in fits and starts over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, the counter-reformers constructed new procedures that bypassed the venues of activist strength in the selection of parliamentary candidates, the party leader, and the selection of the members of NEC. With support from the steering committee of the Labour Solidarity Group of MPs, which formed after the SDP split, OMOV advocates succeeded in extending the selection of parliamentary candidates to all party members at the 1987 party conference, and then further for all three categories of the electoral college in 1993. Using OMOV as their key reform, they made balloting the result of individual choice; dismantling the union block vote and taking the constituency party ballots out of the hands of dedicated activists who could attend meetings. As Meg Russell has noted, “[m]any [reform opponents] would really have preferred to [restore] the responsibility for electing the leader with the PLP, but saw this as untenable within the current environment. To them, broadening the franchise to the whole membership was a second-best solution.”⁷⁵

One year later, Tony Blair, formerly an outside member of Solidarity before his own election to parliament in 1983, won the leadership contest with broad support from all three parts of the party, vastly outraising and outspending his rivals, and articulating a wholesale modernization of the party as New Labour. Under his leadership, the party further extended OMOV balloting to policy matters as well, revitalizing a largely symbolic though no less significant confrontation over the party constitution’s famous Clause IV, which dedicated Labour to pursuing the “common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.” The simple yes/no referendum on Clause IV delivered an overwhelming majority. Despite the fact that less than a third of members cast a ballot, Blair proclaimed the party to have “freed itself from the vanguard politics of the 1980s,” and claimed a decisive mandate to break with the

⁷⁵ Russell, *Building New Labour*, 37.

party's past traditions and reset the terms for the future of Labourism.⁷⁶ As he later told the party conference in 1999, "The class war is over. ...[T]he 21st century will not be about the battle between capitalism and socialism but between the forces of progress and the forces of conservatism."⁷⁷

Moreover, upon returning to government in 1997, New Labour leaders moved to revamp the party's entire policymaking apparatus by introducing a new joint policy committee, a national party forum, and eight policy commissions that would collaborate on formulating the party manifesto. In contrast to the New Left, which had primarily sought reforms to actualize the nominal sovereignty of the party conference, New Labourites went much further, engineering changes that effectively dismantled the policymaking process that had existed for the previous 80 years.⁷⁸ While the policymaking overhaul plan continued to affirm the role of the conference in approving all statements of party policy, it cast the sovereign party body as "a showpiece" – something to be managed for public consumption to mitigate any "difficulties for the party in power."⁷⁹

In sum, in its efforts to unmake the New Left insurgents' reforms, New Labour took on the mantle of reform itself. The former had put questions of party organization and procedure at the center of their campaign to transform the party amid the postwar crisis and their opponents had had little choice but to formulate their counter-insurgency strategy on the new terrain they inherited. While the New Left failed to win the party leadership or see their policy agenda take hold, their campaign for Labour Party democracy reconstructed the basis of party politics in Britain, with effects that continue to shape the internal dynamics of Labour politics today.

⁷⁶ Seyd, "New Parties/New Politics?," 389.

⁷⁷ Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *New Labour's Grassroots: The Transformation of the Labour Party Membership* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 13.

⁷⁸ Seyd, "New Parties/New Politics?," 391.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS RECONSTRUCTIVE INSURGENTS MADE

By approaching political insurgencies in a systematic way, we can see that they assume distinct forms depending on how they relate to existing parties and the governing order. Ranging from TR to Trump, insurgents and their supporters have taken over parties, launched new parties, attacked regime commitments or rearticulated them in new directions. They have railed against corruption, monopoly, and politics as usual, espousing to cut the political Gordian knot by throwing the rascals out, re-empowering the people, and rejuvenating public life. Occasionally, when faced with intractable barriers to entry, insurgents have leveraged an existing legitimacy crisis in party authority to impose new institutional arrangements meant to shift the balance of intraparty power in their favor, giving them the access they previously lacked and new institutional capacities to shape public policy. Those reconstructive insurgencies, I have argued, are unlikely to be electorally successful because the ambition of their reform projects function to galvanize a formidable anti-reform coalition of stakeholders with an invested interest in the old ways of party governance. Nevertheless, even though reconstructive insurgents face insurmountable odds at winning in the strict electoral sense, they can have lasting effects on party politics precisely because they change the rules of the game in ways counter-reforms find difficult to simply undo.

As we have seen in the cases of the US New Politics movement and the British New Left, insurgents aimed to reconfigure an existing major party and, by doing so, restructure the party's role as an intermediary institution between the state and society. Both movements shared a vision of overcoming the core contradictions at the center of their respective postwar orders by reconstructing the relations of authority extending between the party organization, the party in

government, and the party in the electorate. These insurgents were met with multiple organized opponents over time, mitigating the effects of the reforms by whatever means they could. The Coalition for a Democratic Majority and New Democrats, and the Campaign for Labour Victory and New Labour, were ultimately successful at sidelining the insurgent factions in their parties with a well-coordinated campaign against their rivals in the aftermath of a humiliating string of electoral defeats. Crucially, however, counter-reformers found it necessary to frame their attacks in the terms of reform and party democratization, implicitly acknowledging the degree to which the insurgents had shifted the terrain of partisan conflict in the course of their reconstructive politics. To be sure, these new reforms, such as Democratic superdelegates and OMOV, were meant to weaken the institutional power bases of insurgent forces. However, they could only gain credibility and public support by being introduced and branded as the “logical extension of [party] democracy.”⁸⁰

Moreover, distinguishing between different kinds of insurgencies can help us understand the lasting impact they have on politics. The politics these reconstructive insurgents made at the end of the postwar period continue to shape US and British parties today. In the US, although many aspects of the McGovern-Fraser reforms to delegate selection remain in place, continual tinkering with party procedure has become a near-constant feature in a succession of Democratic Party commissions, often meant to fine-tune demands for greater officeholder participation and formal recognition of constituency group representatives. More recently, while their activity is usually ignored, Democratic superdelegates and their role in the selection of the party’s presidential nominee became a critical flashpoint in the insurgency of independent and self-declared democratic socialist Senator Bernie Sanders in 2016. While superdelegates and their overwhelming support for former senator and secretary of state Hillary Clinton did not in fact

⁸⁰ Russell, *Building New Labour*, 45.

decide the closer-than-expected contest, many in the Sanders camp felt that the superdelegates' early announcement of their support for Clinton, and the lack of voter influence over that decision, artificially inflated Clinton's delegate lead and presented an unjustifiable deviation from democratic norms. The upshot has been yet another Democratic reform commission – the Unity Reform Commission – that was offered at the conclusion of the primary race to placate the Sanders camp. Preliminary evidence suggests that their ire directed against the superdelegates will have an effect – the Commission has proposed cutting the proportion of unpledged delegates by 60 percent for the 2020 nomination contest.⁸¹

In Britain, the legacy of the protracted institutional conflict between the New Left and New Labour came to the fore in the leadership contest of 2010, when the electoral college (casting ballots on a OMOV basis) resulted in a narrow split as Ed Miliband beat out his brother with trade union votes despite the latter having a plurality of support from party members and MPs. The split outcome – always a theoretical possibility since grafting OMOV onto the electoral college in 1993 – discredited the party leadership selection process, resulting in yet another wave of procedural reform, this time eliminating the electoral college and replacing it with a pure OMOV system. In addition, the party moved much closer to an American primary system by creating a new category of party supporters, who, for a very small fee, could cast a ballot for Labour leader. The upshot was an unexpected surge in grassroots support of MP backbencher Jeremy Corbyn's nomination, resulting in his very surprising victory despite the vocal opposition of most the PLP. In comparison to the pre-reformed Labour Party, the power of MPs to determine their party leader and shape the party's policy agenda has been strikingly

⁸¹ Adam Hilton, "The Democratic Party's latest reform commission just met. It's likely to slash the power of superdelegates," *Washington Post*, 12 December 2017.

reduced.⁸² If Corbyn is unable to consolidate his legitimacy as party leader, the end of his tenure may well bring new calls for reform to reinstate the peer review capacity of the PLP, especially if his fall comes on the heels of an electoral disaster.

Thus, reconstructive insurgents of the 1970s and 1980s left in their wake partisan organizations that have fewer defenses against new rounds of insurgent challengers – whether reconstructive or not. But more importantly they have also fostered a politics in which party structures are themselves frequently drawn into sharp factional conflicts within parties. Such cyclical rounds of questioning, challenging, and revising the rules and procedures of party governance for factional advantage can have deleterious effects on the legitimacy and overall stability of political parties as vehicles of representation and accountability. This dynamic of perpetual reformism, encouraged by the openness of reconstructed parties, has contributed to the legitimacy crisis democratic governments are grappling with today. As a new age of insurgency has taken hold over the last decade, parties and their role in mediating relations between state and society has been strained, inviting new insurgent challengers and yet more legitimacy problems. It is unclear how governments will respond to these new forms of popular contention, and parties will likely remain in the crosshairs. It is for precisely this reason that political scientists need to think more systematically about insurgents and the politics they make.

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⁸² Meg Russell, “Corbyn as an Organisational Phenomenon: A Response to Steve Richards,” *The Political Quarterly* 87 (January-March 2016): 20-2.

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