

# Success and Failure in Third-Party Politics: The Knights of Labor and the Union Labor Coalition in Massachusetts, 1884–1888

*Gerald Friedman*

University of Massachusetts at Amherst\*

## *Abstract*

The durability of a two party system has been used as evidence of a popular consensus underlying American politics. Instead, I attribute the failure of third party movements to the American electoral system. By awarding election to the candidate with the most votes regardless of the total cast for other candidates, the simple-majority single-ballot (SMSB) system encourages rational voters to vote for the lesser-of-two-evils, their relative preference among the candidates perceived to have a chance of winning. In an SMSB electoral system, the two major parties will normally drift toward the political center to capture centrist voters needed for an electoral majority. By providing voters on the electoral extremes with an alternative, third parties brake the major parties' progressive moderation. Using election data from Massachusetts in the 1880s, I show that when the state's Republican Party drifted to the political right to hold upper-class voters (the "Mugwumps"), the Greenback-Labor Party attracted disenchanted working-class voters, especially those already mobilized by the Knights of Labor. Frightened by the loss of working-class voters, the Republicans enacted a new era in labor legislation in 1886 including a law providing for a state board of strike arbitration including representatives of labor organizations. An analysis of the legislative vote shows the importance of third parties as vehicles promoting reform politics in a structurally-conservative political system because legislators from districts where the Greenback vote exceeded the legislator's own victory margin were significantly more likely to support the arbitration bill. But the quick collapse of the Massachusetts Greenbacks after 1886 shows how difficult it is to sustain an independent political movement in a SMSB electoral system.

## *Third Parties and American Democracy*

Many celebrate the two-party system in the United States as evidence of the popular consensus underlying American political culture.<sup>1</sup> But notwithstanding the "persistent, obdurate, one might almost say tyrannical, two-party system," the political history of the United States is littered with third parties and independent political movements. Significant third-party voting is found in virtually every presidential election and third-party candidates received over five percent of the vote in a third of presidential elections between 1840–2000. Because of third-party voting, seventeen of the last forty-one presidents have been elected with less than fifty percent of the popular vote, including the last three (elected 1992–2000). Many of these independent campaigns had an explicitly working-

class orientation, beginning with the world's first independent working-class political party, Philadelphia's Workingmen's Party of the 1830s, and continuing through the Greenback and Union Labor Parties of the 1870s and 1880s, the Populists of the 1890s, and the twentieth-century's Socialists, Farmer-Labor, Communist, and Progressive Parties.<sup>2</sup> But, unlike their counterparts in Britain, France, Japan, and other capitalist democracies, American workers have never established a political movement able to compete for national political power. None of the independent political movements has survived as a significant political force.<sup>3</sup>

If the two-party system is evidence of the strength of the American consensus, then persistent third-party activity shows continuing dissatisfaction with America's politics. Strong institutional and behavioral obstacles to independent politics make the magnitude of third-party voting even more impressive. Voting for a third party challenges established values and local authorities. "To vote for a third party," political scientists Steven Rosenstone, Roy Behr, and Edward Lazarus argue, "citizens must repudiate much of what they have learned and grown to accept as appropriate political behavior, they must often endure ridicule and harassment from neighbors and friends, they must pay steep costs to gather information on more obscure candidates, and they must accept that their candidate has no hope of winning."<sup>4</sup> These obstacles make it easier to explain the failure of independent politics than to account for its occasional successes and persistent trials. Perhaps the greatest barrier to third parties is the way winners are determined in American elections.<sup>5</sup> By awarding election to the candidate with the most votes regardless of the total cast for other candidates, the simple-majority single-ballot (SMSB) system virtually disenfranchises voters for losing candidates, including those voting for the losing major party as well as those voting for minor parties. Because votes for losing candidates have no impact on the final election, rational voters concerned with the elections outcome will gravitate toward a candidate who may win rather than toward their absolute favorite, toward their *relative* preference among the candidates perceived to have a chance of winning. Choosing their absolute favorite, third-party voters usually have no influence on the final outcome; but by voting for the lesser-of-evils, they may help prevent the election of the worse of the major candidates. From this analysis, Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus conclude that "The single-member-district plurality system is the single largest barrier to third party vitality."<sup>6</sup> Reviewing the electoral experience of democracies throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas, the French political scientist, Maurice Duverger agrees that:

The simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system. Of all the hypotheses that have been defined in this book, this approaches the most nearly perhaps to a true sociological law. An almost complete correlation is observable between the simple-majority single-ballot system and the two-party system . . . exceptions are very rare and can generally be explained as the result of special conditions.<sup>7</sup>

Lesser-evil voting in an SMSB electoral system reinforces the tendency of political parties to move toward the political center. In an SMSB electoral system, contending parties seek victory by attracting voters toward the center of the ideological spectrum, adjusting their programs to attract these marginal voters of centrist politics until they have constructed an electoral majority. Assuming that disgruntled extremist voters will have no alternative when their own party drifts towards the ideological center, party leaders moderate their message without regard for their wishes. They seek election confident that voters in their party's ideological base will continue to support moderate candidates for fear of "wasting their vote" or allowing the election of a "greater evil."

This provides a place for third parties, providing an alternative for disgruntled voters with a strong ideology. But if the major parties' centrist drift explains the persistent popularity of third parties the need to build electoral majorities by attracting marginal centrist voters explains their eventual failures. Third parties restrain the major parties from retreats from principle because they give infra-marginal party loyalists a vehicle through which to express opposition to their parties' centrist drift. But third-party voting satisfies party loyalists thirst for doctrinal fidelity only by risking the election of a "greater evil." For this reason, most third parties are "flash in the pans," disappearing either by fusion with a major party that accepts some of their principles or else, if they cling to their independence, by elimination when voters abandon them for fear they will lead to the election of less-desirable major party candidates.<sup>8</sup>

This paper analyzes third-party voting using the experience of a radical labor reform party to show the strength and limits of third-party movements. After a brief theoretical discussion, the experience of the Greenback-Labor Party in Massachusetts in the mid-1880s is discussed. Greenback voting in the presidential election of 1884 is analyzed to show the sources of the party's vote. Next, the impact of Greenback voting on behavior in the subsequent legislatures is explored to show how the Greenbacks influenced major party politics and government policy. The paper concludes by returning to the general discussion of the role of third-party movements in American politics and the debate over American Exceptionalism.

### *Rational and Irrational Third-Party Voting: Static and Dynamic Effects*

Concerned with winning elections, major party activists dismiss third-party voting. Urging voters to stick with their candidate, they argue that voting for a minor party candidate in an SMSB electoral system risks the election of the less attractive major-party candidate. From this "static" view, the only reason to vote for a minor candidate is because it "feels good." It can never be *instrumental* because it cannot advance the voter's interest in the election of the best possible candidate. Sometimes, the costs of third-party voting are smaller: either the costs of electing the less desirable major-party candidate are relatively small because there is little difference between the major candidates, or one is likely to win elec-

tion by a particularly wide margin. But, from the static approach, third-party voting can never be a rational means to advance political ends.

But, as usual, a “static” analysis is flawed. It treats politics too simply by assuming fixed party policies determined outside of political processes. This necessarily misses the positive impact of third parties, which is to change political dynamics by pressuring major parties to alter their positions. Third parties “stir the waters and prevent stagnation” in American politics by bringing to the fore issues and approaches shunned by the major parties concerned with gaining the support of the same few voters in the ideological center. “Third parties,” William Hesseltine argues, “have performed the function of calling attention to serious problems and pointing a way to their solution. They have stimulated—sometimes by frightening them—the lethargic or timid politicians of the major parties. They have advocated reforms which the older parties have adopted and enacted into law.”<sup>9</sup> “The special service of minor parties in the United States,” agrees another observer, “has been to call attention to economic and social conditions that require consideration and readjustment.”<sup>10</sup>

Third parties influence the major parties by threatening them with the loss of infra-marginal voters normally loyal to a particular party because their position along the ideological spectrum makes the other major party a notably inferior choice. Voters at points A and B in Figure 1, for example, would strongly prefer the “left” and “right” parties, respectively. But, because they have strong ideological positions, these voters will resent their party’s progressive moderation or drift towards the political center (represented by point C in Fig. 1). Unable to vote for the other major party, a third party is their only protest vehicle, their only means to punish their party for neglecting their wishes. For infra-marginal voters, third-party voting, or at least threatening to vote for a third-party candidate, can be rational in a “dynamic” sense because it can discourage the major parties from moving away from their values. By threatening the loss of infra-marginal voters, third parties force the major parties to attend to their base.

### *A Static Model*

Viewing political ideology in static terms, where political parties have fixed positions, voters will switch to a third party only at the risk of contributing to the election of the candidate of the less desired major party. This “static” effect discourages voting for third parties as represented by Equation 1:

$$(1) \Delta U/\Delta T = \Delta U/\Delta R + \alpha * \Delta D/\Delta T$$

Where  $\Delta U/\Delta T$  is the change in welfare from an extra third-party vote;  $\Delta U/\Delta R$  is the change in welfare from the election of the less desired major-party candidate (R);  $\alpha$  is the relative desirability of the preferred major-party candidate (D) winning where  $\alpha = \Delta U/\Delta D - \Delta U/\Delta R$ ; and  $\Delta D/\Delta T$  is the change in the probability that the more desired major-party candidate will win if there is an extra third-party vote.

In Equation 1, both the right-hand-side derivatives ( $\Delta U/\Delta R$  and  $\Delta D/\Delta T$ ) are less than zero while  $\alpha$  is greater than zero. Viewed as a static problem, therefore, defecting to a third party is *always* a bad idea because it raises the chance that the less desirable candidate will win without providing any compensating gain. But there are circumstances that make it an even worse idea.

First, defecting to a third party makes less sense for a party's infra-marginal voters where  $\Delta U/\Delta R$  is large, that is where the less desirable party's candidates are *particularly* undesirable. Intuitively, a party's infra-marginal voters should be more careful to prevent the election of the less-desirable candidate where that candidate is particularly obnoxious.

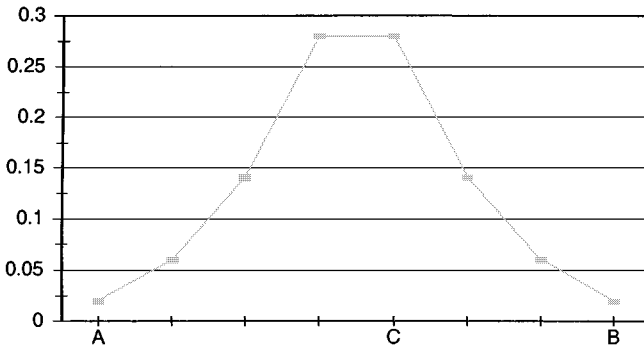
Second, defecting to a third party makes less sense where  $\alpha$  is large and there is a large ideological gap between the two major parties. Intuitively, a party's infra-marginal voters should be more careful to prevent the election of the less-desirable candidate where their party's candidate is much better than the less-desirable candidate.

Finally, defecting makes less sense where  $\Delta D/\Delta T$  is large or where each vote may have a large impact. Intuitively, a party's infra-marginal voters should avoid a third party where there is a chance that their vote will matter because the election is particularly close.

### *Dynamic Considerations*

In Equation 1, voting involves choosing between candidates with fixed ideologies. In this case, there is no gain from voting for a third party; defecting to a third party could be a bad idea or it could be worse but it can never be instrumentally rational because the static model contains no positive terms to balance the losses from increasing the danger of the less desirable candidate winning election. But, as mentioned before, this static analysis neglects the dynamic process where, in their search for elective office, political parties adjust their programs to attract voters. In the language of Equation 1, this can be represented with second-derivative terms, the change in the change in the utility voters receive from the election of each major party candidate with third party voting, or  $\Delta^2 U/\Delta R \Delta T$  and  $\Delta^2 U/\Delta D \Delta T$ . Seen as a dynamic process, third party voting can produce utility gains for infra-marginal voters by pulling the major parties toward their positions. The major parties' response to third-party demands depends on three factors: the sensitivity of the major parties to third-party demands; and the importance of the potential third-party vote: how large it is in absolute numbers and how large it is relative to the margin separating the major parties. Finally, the major parties will be more responsive to third-party demands where fewer voters will be alienated by concessions to the third-party demands.

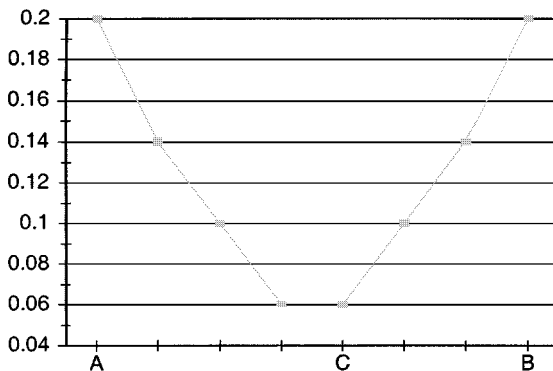
The dynamic impact of third party voting can be seen with the help of Figure 1, which represents the distribution of voters along a single ideological dimension. Concerned with winning election in a system with SMSB, pragmatic political leaders will seek to accommodate voters around the median point of the ideological distribution. Tailoring their campaign to voters like C in Figure



1. Distribution of voters around a moderate consensus.

1, pragmatic politicians will neglect voters like A and B to drift toward the ideological center. This centrist drift will antagonize A and B but pragmatic party leaders will ignore their complaints, assuming that, following static logic, these voters “have no place to go.” But a third party gives A or B an exit option, complicating the task facing party leaders who now must evaluate the gains from the centrist drifting net of voters lost from the party’s base who quit rather than tolerate further pragmatism.

How far a pragmatic politician should go to accommodate a third party depends in part on the shape of the ideological distribution. In Figure 1, for example, there are relatively few voters on the political extremes (points A and B) who will be lost to a third party compared with the larger number to be gained in the center (around point C). A more difficult situation is shown in Figure 2 where the political extremes are large relative to the centrist voters around point C. Because the extremes are balanced, pragmatic politicians will still contest a two-party election around point C. But, in this distribution of opinion, they will find it hard to ignore third-party activity because there are many voters to be lost



2. Distribution of voters with strong extremes.

on the extremes. Even the most pragmatic, non-ideological politician will find that, although elections may not be won on the extremes, they can be lost there by antagonizing their base in the search of centrist voters.

How politicians perceive the shape of the ideological distribution should have much to do with determining a party's flexibility toward the demands of a third party. Leaders who believe there are few voters to be lost on the extremes but many in the center (as in Fig. 1) will readily reject third-party demands. On the other hand, those who believe there are many voters on the extremes (as in Fig. 2) will be more inclined to abandon the search for votes in the center by making concessions to putative third parties to prevent massive defections.

A strong third-party showing demonstrates to politicians the strength of the political extremes, suggesting that the distribution of opinion is more like Figure 2 than Figure 1. For this reason, major parties will be readier to make concessions to third parties that have demonstrated electoral strength. But the number of votes a third party might represent is only one element of its political leverage. Just as important is the margin between the major candidates, both secure victors and major party candidates facing guaranteed defeat need not accommodate the wishes of third parties. Finally, rational politicians assess the *net* not the *gross* gain from accommodating (or rejecting) a third party's demands, not only the voters regained at the extremes but also those now lost in the center.

All together, this gives seven factors to consider in assessing the likely impact of third party voting: three static and four dynamic conditions. Supporting a third party is more rational, or less of a bad idea, under three *static* conditions:

1. The less attractive major party is not particularly undesirable.
2. There is a smaller ideological gap between the major parties.
3. There is a larger victory margin for the winning candidate.

In addition, voting for a third party is more likely to achieve a voter's goals of changing the major parties' positions under four dynamic conditions:

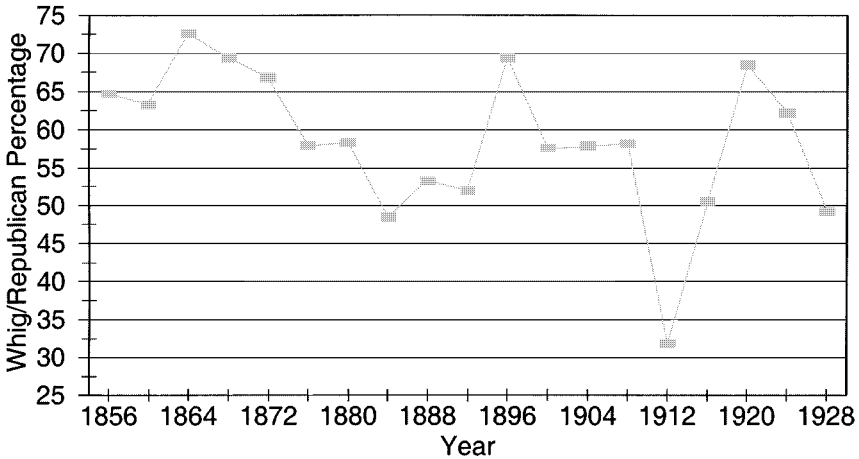
4. The major parties are ideologically flexible, more interested in winning elections than in maintaining any particular political positions.
5. The third party is likely to attract a large number of voters. (Because the tails of the distribution of opinion are relatively thick.)
6. There is a smaller victory margin for the winning candidate so neither party can risk losing supporters in its base.
7. The third party presents demands that are unlikely to alienate many voters.

#### *The Massachusetts Greenback-Labor Party of 1884*

Massachusetts has rarely had a competitive party system. Before the Civil War, the state voted for the Federalists and, after their collapse, it became a Whig

stronghold. Following the disintegration of the Whigs, the state flirted briefly with the American Party (a.k.a. the “Know Nothings”) before enlisting in the new Republican Party where it remained for seventy years. Since shifting over to the Democrats with Al Smith and Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, the state has remained a Democratic stronghold. From 1856–1872, Republican presidential nominees averaged sixty-seven percent of the state’s vote. All of the state’s senators in Washington from 1864 to 1884 and over eighty percent of its representatives in Congress were Republicans. Massachusetts was almost as Republican on the state and local levels. Every governor elected 1856–1872 was a Republican and Republicans had overwhelming majorities in both houses of the state legislature.

Like the rest of the United States, Massachusetts drifted away from the Republicans in the late 1870s, creating a brief period of competitive politics. Nationally, 1876–1896 was one of the few periods in American history when the two-way division of our politics struck an almost even balance. This was true even in Republican-dominated Massachusetts where the Republican share of the presidential vote dropped to fifty-eight percent for Hayes and Garfield in 1876 and 1880 and fell to forty-eight percent in 1884, almost the lowest share a Republican presidential nominee would receive for seventy years (see Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Nor was Blaine’s weakness an isolated phenomenon. Republicans continued to win most state and local elections in Massachusetts in the 1880s but they lost the governorship in 1882 and many other elections were fiercely contested. Narrow election margins forced Republicans to be particularly attentive to all elements of the electorate because even small voting blocks could turn elections.



3. Whig/Republican share of Massachusetts Presidential vote, 1836–1928.

Source: United States, Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States, from Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D.C., 1960), 687–689.

Defections from two groups in particular undermined the Republican majority in the 1880s. On one side, there were the well-born elite reformers who were alienated by political corruption, free-spending on soldiers' pensions, southern reconstruction, and the Republican Party's continued flirtation with economic experiments: greenbacks, monetary inflation, and protective tariffs. Labeled "Mugwumps," they included prominent lawyers and intellectuals including Josiah Quincy, Richard Henry Dana, and President Charles Eliot of Harvard. Economic liberals, they formed a block mobilized against further concessions to organized labor.

It was hard for Republican leaders to accommodate the Mugwumps' demands because their defection was matched across the political spectrum by protests among radical workers and labor reformers disappointed with the Party's cautious approach to economic reform. Seeking legislation restricting the hours of work, limiting child labor, providing for workplace safety, and supporting labor unions, labor activists in the 1850s and 1860s had flirted with Democratic politicians and with independent politics.<sup>12</sup> But, in the early 1880s, disappointment with the failure of Republican leaders to deliver on promised reforms, large numbers of workers appeared ready to join their movement. One labor radical bemoaned elections like the presidential vote of 1884, saying it "would be a mere sham of no consequence at all . . . if we had but the two plague-stricken parties in the field . . . their candidates but the hirelings of capital."<sup>13</sup> A later historian agreed, branding the period's two-party competition as "more and more merely a struggle for office," The major parties

waged essentially empty campaigns. They appealed to wartime loyalties, they exposed each other's corruption and claimed moral superiority, and they magnified out of proportion the few real issues, like the tariff, that divided them. But on the fundamental question of the time—the role of government in a modern industrial society—the two national parties had no quarrel. Both saw an identity of interest between the government and the great banking, manufacturing, and railroad corporations.<sup>14</sup>

From the 1850s on, one man, Benjamin F. Butler, best represented the hopes of labor reform voters in Massachusetts. A national Democrat, he voted for Jefferson Davis fifty-seven times at the Democratic convention of 1860, Butler seemed an odd leader for the radical left of any party. But he had been a radical democrat since he began his first try for elective office in 1846. There, a woolen mill owner who ran his textile factory on a ten-hour workday, he ran for Lowell City Council as a Democrat stressing shorter hours for mill workers. He lost "but his stand on this matter endeared him to the working class."<sup>15</sup> Elected to the state senate, Butler sponsored legislation to restrict the hours of manufacturing work: "Let Massachusetts set the example of short hours," he said, "her manufacturers are strong enough to do it and the others will soon be brought in."<sup>16</sup> In 1850, Butler sponsored the "Coalition" uniting Democrats and Free Soilers behind a platform favoring the ten-hour day, secret ballot, popular election of

judges, homestead exemption law, redistribution of seats in state House, and reduction in the poll tax. Coalitionists won the election in 1850, electing Democrat George Boutwell to Governor's chair and Freesoiler Charles Sumner to Senate, despite warnings from employers that "Whoever employed by this corporation votes the Ben Butler ten-hour ticket on Monday next will be discharged."<sup>17</sup>

Service as a general in the Civil War made Butler a strong advocate of the freeman, including emancipation and, later, civil rights and universal suffrage. Butler returned to Congress after the War as a Radical Republican, taking up the leadership of the Radical bloc after the death of Thaddeus Stevens. Butler sponsored measures to protect the civil rights of the freemen, shorten the work week, protect trade unions, and inflate the currency. In addition to serving as house manager in the impeachment of President Johnson, Butler sponsored the Ku Klux Klan Bill (1873) and the Civil Rights Bill (1875) and was an acknowledged national leader of currency reform, a unique role among New England Congressmen, and one of the counsel in the legal tender case (*Julliard vs. Greenman*).

Butler's long dedication to labor reform knit his career together and endeared him to Massachusetts workers and antagonized their employers. Labor reform was the *leitmotif* of Butler's long political career from his early days in the Massachusetts legislature in the 1850s, when he supported labor unions, ten-hour day legislation, and the voting rights of poor mill workers through his work on the legal defense of the Haymarket martyrs in the late 1880s. As congressman from Essex County in the 1860s and 1870s, he spoke for strikers and labor unions. His reputation as "an advocate of justice to the laboring man" made him a favorite of working-class voters throughout the Commonwealth, indeed throughout the United States. A national leader of the labor movement, he regularly received petitions from labor organizations including those outside of his district.<sup>18</sup>

Angered by the national Republican Party's readiness to abandon southern reconstruction, civil rights, and monetary inflation, Butler left the Republican Party in 1878 to run for governor of Massachusetts as an independent. His parting was not regretted by many in the Party. Butler complained that "If I had been the firm, ardent . . . advocate of the hard-money views of the money-lenders of State Street, I should have been their pet and not their aversion and Massachusetts would have given me anything on earth that was in her gift." Instead, "following my convictions I suffer the penalties of all reformers."<sup>19</sup> President Hayes declared Butler's defeat in reelection to Congress in 1878, "one of the best events that has happened since the war." Butler was, Hayes said, "the most dangerous and wicked demagogue we have ever had."<sup>20</sup>

Conservatives warned that Butler represented, in E. L. Godkin's words, "the organization, prematurely and under false colors, but still the organization of such a commune as America would now supply."<sup>21</sup> Defeated as an independent, Butler returned to the Democratic Party in 1881, winning election as Governor of Massachusetts in 1882 as only the second Democrat elected governor of Massachusetts since the formation of the Republican Party. As governor, But-

ler pushed a radical program of social and democratic reform. Liberals flocked to congratulate him on his election as governor, including Wendell Phillips and Susan B. Anthony. His 2½ hour inaugural address did not disappoint them. He called for repeal of the state poll tax, easier voter registration, female suffrage, reform of the poor relief system, workers' compensation, strike arbitration, and support for labor unions.<sup>22</sup> As governor, Butler appointed the first African-American judge in Massachusetts history (George Ruffin) and the first Irish Catholic to be given a judicial office (J. McCafferty). But, he accomplished little else in his one-year term. Facing solid Republican and conservative majorities in the General Court (the Massachusetts legislature) and the Governor's Council, Butler accomplished little in the one tumultuous term he served before being defeated for re-election.

Defeat did little to discourage Butler's ambitions, nor did it significantly weaken the support he enjoyed from the state's, and the nation's, labor reformers. Even before the major parties met to choose their presidential nominees in 1884, Butler was nominated for president by the Greenback Party and the newly-minted Anti-Monopoly Party. Hoping to use these to leverage the Democratic nomination, Butler attended the Democratic convention where he presented a minority platform favoring currency inflation, strike mediation, immigration reform, labor unions, and tariff protection. Butler warned the Democrats: "If you refuse to stand by the workingmen, God help you, I cannot."<sup>23</sup> But his efforts were unavailing; the Democrats passed over Butler in favor of the conservative, hard-money candidate, Grover Cleveland.

Rejected by Republicans and Democrats, Butler again, changed parties to accept the Greenback and Anti-Monopoly nominations. Freely attacking both major parties, while accepting money from both, Butler declared that he had "belonged to the Democratic party till it attempted to destroy the Union, and was with the Republican party till it deserted its founders, the laboring men." The capitalists, he charged, "now hold the Republican party bound hand and foot. Hayes has violated every pledge and betrayed the Negroes of the South" and Grant's efforts to restore the Gold standard in order to strengthen public credit was nothing more than a "swindle."<sup>24</sup> The Republicans, he warned, were "kept alive by the cohesive power of public plunder." The Democrats were maintained by monopolistic big business: the Erie Railroad, the Rockefeller interests, and Southern employers exploiting Negro labor.<sup>25</sup> Butler's supporters warned that "It is better not to vote at all than to cast a ballot that may yet be turned upon you . . . the man who votes for Blaine or for Cleveland must bear his share of responsibility for all acts of whichever of these men is elected."<sup>26</sup> Despite the \$200,000 of his own money that he invested in his campaign and the large crowds he attracted, Butler himself had no illusions about his chance of winning the election. He hoped, however, that "at worst, even in the infancy of our organization, we can hold the balance of power between the two old parties; so that if we cannot wholly prevent bad and unjust legislation, we can force them to bend together to enact it."<sup>27</sup> I could not find a better analysis of the dynamic approach to third-party activity.

The Anti-Monopoly Party (or Greenbacks, sometimes People's Party) did poorly nationally, attracting barely half the vote the Greenbacks drew in 1880. But because of Butler's great personal popularity with laborers he drew an unusually strong vote in the east for a third-party candidate, gaining over 24,000 votes, out of 303,000 cast, in Massachusetts, the highest share received by a Massachusetts third party between the Civil War and Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive Party campaign in 1912. Butler's showing in Massachusetts was all the more impressive "considering that employers in his home state quite literally hated him and that the secret ballot had not yet come into use" and employers would routinely march their workers to the polls on election day to cast their votes as a block.<sup>28</sup> Against him stood both political parties, their media outlets, and all the forces of established economic power. Without an established party organization, Butler relied for institutional support on the union movement, including the Massachusetts state Knights of Labor (KOL).<sup>29</sup> In this, he benefited from the period's rising labor militancy and increasing union membership.

Sniffing victory, Massachusetts Democrats attacked Butler without pause. A vote for him, the pro-Democratic *Boston Herald* warned, is wasted, it "is a vote in the air. By casting such a vote, the voter voluntarily retires from the contest." Worse, this paper and others circulated Democratic charges that Butler had made an arrangement with the Republicans to help Blaine. A vote for Butler "is helping him to carry out a corrupt bargain with the Blaine managers."<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this campaign of calumny worked, or else maybe the Democrats need not have worried, but Butler's vote drew few Democrats. Instead, most of his vote came from expanding the electorate and by raiding the *Republican* column. (Note that Butler's ten percent corresponds well with the ten percentage point decline in the Republican vote share in 1884 compared with 1880.) Butler ran poorly among Irish voters and in Democratic strongholds like Boston. Instead, a comparison of the vote by town in 1880 and 1884 suggests that Butler's votes came from the ranks of the non-voters and from those who voted Republican in 1880. Virtually none of the voters who had supported Winfield Hancock, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1880, voted for Butler; but Butler received eight percent of the votes cast by voters who had voted for Garfield, the Republican nominee, and twenty-five percent of the votes of new voters (see Table 1). In addition to pulling working-class radicals away from the Republican party, Butler drew voters to the polls who had been unwilling to choose either of the major party nominees in 1880.<sup>31</sup>

Many scholars have shown the importance of ethno-cultural factors in post-Civil War electoral behavior and there is evidence that these factors largely explain voting for the Democratic and Republican parties. I have estimated regressions for the logit of the vote share for Blaine, Cleveland, and Butler, the candidates of the Republican, Democratic, and Greenback-Labor parties, respectively (see Table 2). This analysis confirms the importance of ethno-cultural considerations for Democratic and Republican voting. The Democratic share was greatest in large cities with many foreign-born voters while the Republicans were strongest in small towns populated by the native-born. But, contrary to the ethno-

TABLE 1. Flow of voters, Massachusetts 1880–1884.

		Voting 1884		
		GLP	GOP	Dem
Voting 1880	GLP	8,874	2,622	(10,186)
	GOP	13,822	161,114	(16,941)
	Dem	(816)	(25,646)	138,941
	Nonvoter	4,755	8,716	5,716

*Notes:* This table shows estimates of the behavior of voters in the 1884 presidential election according to their vote in 1880. Estimates are based on regressions of voting by party in 1884 in 342 Massachusetts towns and cities as a function of votes for the Democratic, Republican, or Greenback presidential candidates in 1880 and the net change in total number of votes cast in the town or city between 1880 and 1884.

*Source:* Vote data are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Manual for the use of the General Court* (Boston, 1886).

cultural view, foreign birth had little impact on voting for the Greenbacks. Instead, Greenback voting reflected economic class and the mobilization of workers into class-conscious organizations. Butler drew his strongest support in towns where a high proportion of the labor force was employed as wage workers in industrial occupations, and where many workers belonged to the Knights of Labor (KOL). From the regressions in Table 2, one may estimate that an increase of ten percentage points in the share of workers belonging to the KOL is associated with an increase in the vote for Butler of nearly two percentage points, or fifteen percent. By contrast, class has little impact on voting for the Republicans or Democrats; a higher share of proletarians raises the vote for the Democrats slightly and lowers the Republican vote, but the differences are small (see Table 3). From these regressions one may estimate that proletarian voters are thirty-five percent more likely to vote for Butler than are non-proletarians, and members of the KOL are sixty percent more likely to vote for Butler than are non-proletarians.<sup>32</sup>

Proletarian status and membership in the KOL explain much of the impact of voter mobilization on the Butler vote share. After controlling for other variables, especially membership in the KOL, turnout has only a small direct impact on Greenback voting. The high Greenback vote among new voters reflected the impact of the KOL on voting; members of the KOL are more likely to vote and then vote for Butler. An increase of ten percentage points in the share of proletarians belonging to the KOL is associated with an increase in the proportion of eligible voters voting 0.6 percentage points or nearly one percent.<sup>33</sup>

### *Responding to the Third-Party Challenge*

Ben Butler antagonized and frightened Boston's Brahman elite as much as he had the New Orleans white upper-class. Two circumstances magnified respectable Boston's fears. First, the surge in labor radicalism and political activi-

TABLE 2. Determinants of voting, Massachusetts towns, presidential election of 1884.

Variable	Greenback-Labor		Republican		Democrat		
	Means	Coef.	T-statistic	Coef.	T-statistic	Coef.	T-statistic
Intercept	1.000	-2.3272	-4.342	1.0357	4.704	-1.4858	-6.081
Percentage voters proletarians	0.345	1.0168	3.884	-0.0823	-0.651	-0.171	-1.224
Percentage LF industry	0.465	1.4652	2.882	-0.1113	-0.526	-0.5077	-2.174
Log of town population	8.008	-0.093	-3.021	-0.0637	-4.759	0.0797	5.507
Percentage voters foreign born	0.142	0.5747	1.197	-1.9626	-8.124	2.2542	8.806
Log of establishment size in town	2.547	-0.2911	-3.404	0.1745	4.722	-0.1101	-2.72
Turnout (share of eligible men voting)	0.699	0.2426	0.468	-0.5667	-2.792	0.7675	3.428
Percentage of proletarians in Knights of Labor	0.075	1.5646	4.068	-0.7294	-4.088	0.2106	1.036
Mean of dependent variable		-2.141		-0.0625		-0.3671	
F Value		16.007		36.073		40.252	
R-square		0.268		0.419		0.446	
N	372	313		357		357	

Note: This table reports the results of weighted-OLS regressions where the dependent variable is the logarithm of  $p/(1-p)$  where  $p$  is the percentage of the vote cast for the presidential candidate of each party. The weight used is  $p^*(1-p)^{*x84}$  where  $x84$  is the square root of the total number of votes cast. Note that towns with no votes cast for a party had zero weight and are dropped from the analysis. Source: Vote data are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Manual for the use of the General Court* (Boston, 1886) except for Boston ward voting data which are from the *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 4, 1884), 3. Town population characteristics are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Census of Massachusetts, 1885* (Boston, 1888). KOL membership is estimated from data in Jonathan Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Conn., 1982).

TABLE 3. Party voting by selected groups, Massachusetts towns, presidential election of 1884.

	Greenback	Republican	Democrat
KOL	10.91	45.16	40.62
Non-KOL proletarians	9.21	46.88	40.92
Non-proletarians	6.81	49.88	39.80
Foreign-born	8.09	45.65	43.40
Native-born	7.97	49.11	39.51
Towns	5.73	56.04	34.13
Springfield or Worcester	11.64	52.45	33.16
Boston	6.37	35.68	55.81

*Note:* Mean vote share for KOL members is calculated as a weighted average of the vote by town where the weights are KOL membership. The number of non-KOL proletarians is estimated as the number of wage earners minus KOL members; the number of non proletarians is the labor force minus the number of proletarians.

The mean vote share for foreign- and native-born voters calculated as a weighted average of the vote by town where the weights are the number of foreign- or native-born voters.

The average vote for towns other than Springfield, Worcester, or Boston is the average of the vote share by party for those towns. The vote for Springfield and Worcester is the average of the vote share by town for those two cities.

TABLE 4. Determinants of voter turnout. Massachusetts towns, presidential election of 1884.

Variable	Means	Coefficient	T-statistic
Intercept	1.0000	0.9073	7.227
Percentage voters proletarians	0.3450	0.2797	1.715
Percentage LF industry	0.4651	0.0724	0.323
Log of town population	8.0077	-0.0480	-4.256
Percentage voters foreign born	0.1417	0.0479	0.233
Log of establishment size in town	2.5473	0.0350	0.793
Percentage of proletarians in Knights of Labor	0.0745	0.2982	1.751
Mean of dependent variable	0.7131		
F Value	6.7120		
R-square	0.1029		
N	357		

*Note:* This table reports the results of weighted-OLS regressions where the dependent variable is the logarithm of  $p/(1-p)$  where  $p$  is the percentage of voters voting in the presidential election. The weight used is  $p*(1-p)*x84$  where  $x84$  is the square root of the total number of eligible voters.

*Source:* Vote data are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Manual for the use of the General Court* (Boston, 1886) except for Boston ward voting data which are from the *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 4, 1884). 3. Town population characteristics are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Census of Massachusetts, 1885* (Boston, 1888). KOL membership is estimated from data in Jonathan Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Conn., 1982).

ty in the 1880s augmented the pool of radical workers. Membership in the Knights of Labor exploded in the 1880s as did support for independent labor politics.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the narrow margin separating the two major parties, magnified the Greenback Labor Party's leverage. The Greenbacks represented the balance of power in the state. Of 241 members of the lower house of the Massachusetts legislature elected in 1885, 98 were elected by fewer votes than were cast in their districts for Butler in the 1884 presidential election. The Greenbacks and their radical worker voters were in a position to swing elections in Massachusetts.

Brahmins could bewail Butler's success but professional politicians in the Democratic and Republican parties scrambled to win back working-class voters without alienating too many respectable voters. Both parties found this a challenging task. In addition to ideological concerns that limited their flexibility, party leaders feared that labor reforms would alienate middle- and upper-class swing voters. But, in terms of the dynamic considerations discussed earlier, the large third-party vote and the narrow margin between the major party candidates gave both parties an incentive to adopt labor reform proposals.

The Democrats found it easier to accommodate labor's demands. Their immigrant and working-class base included many voters inclined to sympathize with labor reform demands. Furthermore, while the party's upper class leadership and new Mugwump allies opposed labor reform, pro-labor Democrats found protection in their party's weakness. The minority party in the legislature, holding only 76 of 241 seats in the lower house, the Democrats could deny responsibility for the enactment of legislation. Voting mischievously, they could act to attract new voters without having to justify to others the implications of their voting.

By contrast, the majority Republicans had no political cover. Because their votes made legislation, they risked antagonizing conservatives if they enacted legislation to lure Greenback voters back to the fold. Republican leaders would happily have avoided this dilemma, as they had through the 1870s, by shunning labor issues. But the press of events and the Greenbacks' electoral strength precluded this approach. By 1886, labor militancy was brought to the center of American consciousness by strike waves that shook the foundations of American industry. "For several weeks," the *Bankers' Magazine* reported in 1886, "the most prominent social phenomena have been the numerous outbreaks between employers and employees. All over the country this extraordinary state of things exists . . . Never before has anything of the kind occurred . . . The strikes now raging are like a huge wave rolling over the land."<sup>35</sup> The business press warned that strikes threatened prosperity with demands "so absolutely revolutionary of the normal relations between labor and capital, that it has naturally produced a partial paralysis of business." The rapidly growing Knights of Labor especially frightened conservatives. Its demands were "so utterly revolutionary of the inalienable rights of the citizen and so completely subversive of social order" that the whole community should "come to a firm conclusion that these pretensions must be resisted to the last extremity."<sup>36</sup>

Surging labor radicalism prevented politicians from ignoring labor issues but employers' uncompromising hostility to organized labor left politicians few options to appease reformers without antagonizing voters on the right. Conservatives warned that politicians were ready to undermine capitalism to appease angry workers. At the peak of labor agitation in May 1886, the *Boston Evening Transcript* charged that a "fierce gale has been blowing all along in the alleged interest of labor." This conservative paper attacked politicians who were ready to compromise the interests of business in their search for the labor vote.<sup>37</sup> "Politicians" like these, MIT-president Francis Walker complained, "groveled, as only American politicians can grovel, before all who were supposed to exercise any influence among the Knights." "Legislators," he charged, "began to prepare bills with blank spaces to be filled in according to whatever should be ascertained to be the wishes of the new party."<sup>38</sup>

Reformers sought a path out of this dilemma by proposing collective bargaining and *voluntary* state strike mediation to reconcile labor and capital. State strike mediation was attractive to politicians because it was a way to appease labor without antagonizing capitalists too much. Employers were urged to negotiate with unions, with the promise that collective bargaining would lead to responsible trade unions who would refrain from striking. Without defending strikes, these reformers attributed unrest to material conditions facing workers rather than to the propaganda of radical agitators and argued that these material conditions could be addressed by encouraging responsible unions through collective bargaining.<sup>39</sup> Instead of repression, they proposed extending democracy, giving workers a voice in industry by making strong labor unions agents in a system of collective bargaining. "Labor troubles," wrote the long-time Massachusetts commissioner of labor, Carroll Wright, "are as often the result of a lack of information as to the true state of a trade as of any other thing." But if a system of arbitration was established, "the age of lock-outs and strikes" would be replaced by "the rule of reason . . . and, when it shall hold sway, capital and labor will learn that their interests are reciprocal and not antagonistic."<sup>40</sup>

Welcoming this outside support, labor leaders endorsed calls for state systems to encourage conciliation and arbitration. The KOL's interest in arbitration is well known; they list it twice in their twenty-two point national program.<sup>41</sup> But even trade union leaders supported state-sponsored arbitration. Led by its leaders Adolph Strasser and Samuel Gompers, the New York State Workingmen's Assembly endorsed legislation to establish a system of state arbitration in New York.<sup>42</sup>

Massachusetts politicians responded to Greenback Labor Party (GLP) voting and the "labor scare" of the mid-1880s with a new era in labor legislation.<sup>43</sup> Laws were enacted regulating workplaces to prevent fires, providing for weekly payments, employers liability, restricting child and convict labor, laws to encourage employee stock ownership, and to establish a labor day holiday. The centerpiece of the new era was an "act to provide for a state board of arbitration for the settlement of differences between employers and their employees."<sup>44</sup> Seen by contemporaries as a "radical and important departure in labor

legislation,” state-house correspondents for the major Boston newspapers called the bill a major victory for organized labor, especially for the Knights of Labor.<sup>45</sup> They attributed its enactment to political considerations. Democrats, the *Boston Herald’s* statehouse correspondent explained, hoped to capitalize on their strength among Irish-American workers to gain union support in the upcoming elections. For their part, Republicans approved the bill’s passage “from fear of labor’s wrath.” They hoped to maintain their precarious popular majority in the hope that timely concessions would at least minimize labor’s hostility. Ironically, one reporter claimed the KOL lobbyists “hoped the bill would not be supported” so they could use its defeat as propaganda for their independent labor slate in the fall elections.<sup>46</sup>

A test of labor’s political influence, the vote on the arbitration bill gives us an opening into the response of the major parties to independent labor politics. Business interests opposed the law, especially provisions giving the arbitration board investigative powers and according official sanction to organized labor by requiring that one of the board’s three members belong to a labor organization.<sup>47</sup> Strongly supported by organized labor, these provisions were enacted only by narrow margins. Regressions have been estimated where the dependent variable is an index of pro-labor voting.<sup>48</sup> Independent variables have been included to reflect both structural characteristics of the legislators’ districts, including the share of the voters who were proletarians and the industrial distribution of the population, the proportion foreign born and city size, the legislators’ own characteristics and party, and measures of mobilized worker pressure, including union membership and support for Butler and the Greenback Labor Party in the last presidential election (see Table 5).<sup>49</sup>

The most important results from these regressions are for the constituency pressure variables, especially GLP voting. These suggest that politicians adjusted their policies to attract the large voting blocks of KOL and GLP supporters. Legislators from districts where the KOL or the GLP were strong were much more likely to vote with labor. About six percent of Massachusetts workers belonged to the KOL in 1886; membership increases the average legislator’s pro-labor voting by nearly 0.15, enough by itself to explain the enactment of the arbitration legislation. Previous GLP voting also influenced legislators to support the arbitration legislation. After controlling for other characteristics, legislators from districts where the GLP vote was one standard deviation above the average (13.2 percent) had pro-labor scores 0.45 above those one standard deviation below the mean (2.2 percent) (see Table 5). GLP voting had its greatest impact on legislators elected by narrow margins. Republicans from districts where the GLP vote was less than the legislator’s margin of victory have an average pro-labor voting score of  $-0.78$ ; but those from districts where the GLP vote exceeded their own margin have a score 0.65 higher, or  $-0.13$ .<sup>50</sup> Controlling for other characteristics, in districts where the GLP vote exceeded the winners’ victory margin, the legislators’ pro-labor vote score was nearly 0.49 higher than elsewhere. If there had been no GLP votes at all, then the average pro-labor vote score would have been only  $-0.47$  rather than  $+0.05$ ; labor’s po-

TABLE 5. Pro-labor voting by members of the Massachusetts State Assembly.  
Voting on Labor Arbitration bill, April 1886.

Variable	Mean	Coefficient	T-statistic
Intercept	1.00	-2.95	-3.05
Percentage voters proletarians	0.49	-0.77	-1.03
Legislator's occupation			
Worker	0.16	0.43	1.80
Employer	0.35	-0.44	-2.22
Lawyer	0.14	-0.56	-2.15
Republican	0.66	-1.52	-7.88
Share Greenback for President, 1884	0.08	3.81	2.33
Greenback vote exceeds legislator's election margin	0.41	0.38	2.39
Percentage LF industry	0.60	1.47	1.33
Percentage voters foreign born	0.21	1.14	1.01
Log of capital/labor ratio in town's industry	5.13	0.55	3.85
Strikers/wage earners in town, 1881-mid 1886	0.04	0.34	0.48
Share of proletarians in Knights of Labor	0.055	2.53	1.12
Mean of dependent variable	0.046		
F Value	16.947		
R-square	0.450		
N	239		

*Note:* This table reports the results of regressions where the dependent variable is  $PROLABOR = v1 + v2$  where  $v1$  is the legislators' vote on enacting the arbitration bill on April 7, 1886, and  $v2$  is his vote on dropping the requirement that a member of the arbitration board belong to a labor organization.  $V1$  and  $v2$  are +1 where legislator's voted the pro-labor organization position (enacting the bill and not concurring with the State Senate), -1 if they voted against labor, and 0 if they did not vote.

*Source:* Legislative votes are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Journal of the House, 1886* (Boston, 1886), 427, 587. Occupations are from *Ibid.*, 832-843. Town population characteristics are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Census of Massachusetts, 1885* (Boston, 1888). Election data, including the matching of towns and legislative districts, are from Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Manual for the use of the General Court* (Boston, 1886), except for Boston ward voting data which are from the *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 4, 1885), 3. Legislator's party is from the *Boston Evening Transcript* (November 4, 1885), 2. The number of strikers by town is from United States, Commissioner of Labor, *Report, 1886* (Washington, 1887), 228-59. KOL membership is estimated from data in Jonathan Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Conn., 1982).

sition on the strike mediation bill would have been defeated rather than narrowly enacted.

The Massachusetts legislature in 1886 included more worker-legislators, sixteen percent, than have most other American legislatures.<sup>51</sup> These members' pro-labor vote scores were significantly higher than were those for the larger number of legislators with employer or legal backgrounds. Legislators listing a background as an employer or a lawyer, over half of the legislature, were less likely to support labor on the arbitration bill. On these issues, lawyers voted like employers against labor.

Legislators supported labor's position on arbitration legislation from fear of a politically mobilized constituency. But few felt compelled to appease *passive* constituents. Structural characteristics of the electorate, such as the proportion proletarian and the industrial distribution of the labor force, had little impact on legislative voting. Legislators from heavily industrialized communities had slightly more pro-labor voting records but those from districts with a large share of working-class voters were slightly less likely to favor state arbitration. The only community structure variable that is significant in these regressions is the average capital to labor ratio in manufacturing. This finding may suggest that representatives of highly capitalized industries were readier than other employers to accept labor organization.

### *Third Parties, Class Conflict, and America's Democratic State*

The presidential election of 1884 was the last hurrah for Ben Butler and the Massachusetts Greenbacks. After thirty years as state legislator, political general, congressman, governor, advisor to presidents, and leader of the Republican Party's radical wing, Butler left politics to practice law. Until his death in 1893, he remained committed to radical social reform, even representing the Haymarket martyrs before the United States Supreme Court. But Butler never again ran for elective office.

Nor did the surge in third-party voting and independent radical politics of the 1880s lead to a strong independent working-class political movement in the Bay State. The Massachusetts Greenbacks faded quickly after 1884. Even relatively strong showings in 1884 and 1886 gave them too few votes to win elections. But without the prospect of victory, few activists were ready to uphold the cause, and few voters were ready to follow them. The readiness of Democratic and Republican politicians to accommodate labor's demands and the logic of a SMSB electoral system undermined independent politics. Wendell Phillips warned radicals that "Both parties will bid—are bidding—for our support. They will attempt to buy us off by half-way concessions, enough to save their party and disarm rising revolt. . . ." <sup>52</sup> His warnings were unheeded. Having used the third-party campaign to show their strength, labor leaders then abandoned it to trade electoral influence for policy or patronage. Both parties competed for the third-party vote, undermining attempts to maintain an active third-party movement. When the Republicans responded to the Greenback vote with a bevy of labor reform legislation, the Democrats nominated KOL leader Frank Foster for lieutenant governor in 1886.

The GLP experience highlights the importance of the particular electoral system in undermining radical politics in the United States. The ten percent of the vote achieved by the Massachusetts GLP in 1884 was a higher share than was won by most contemporary European socialists. The scattered French socialists, received barely one percent of the vote in the 1880s and the German Social Democrats received less than ten percent of the vote in 1884 and barely ten percent in 1887. <sup>53</sup> But when these small socialist parties grew to become powerful

movements, in Massachusetts, as throughout the United States, radical politics remained a local flash-in-the-pan; occasional electoral strength never grew into a significant independent political force.<sup>54</sup> The early and recurrent strength of American political radicalism contradicts arguments attributing the weakness of independent radical political movements to popular support for a liberal consensus favorable to capitalism. Instead the Massachusetts experience suggests that scholars should seek *political* rather than cultural explanations for the political phenomenon of American Exceptionalism. By inhibiting third-party politics and pushing politicians toward the political center, the SMSB system limits labor's influence to that of an interest group bargaining within broader coalition parties rather than an independent political force. This suggests a second direction for further research based on this paper: the use of political power to undermine organized labor politics.

The established political parties and their allies help the logic of two-party politics by undermining the institutional and behavioral props for independent radical politics. One such prop was the radical labor movement and the Knights of Labor. Radical unions win their strikes with appeals for public support; a system of state-sponsored collective bargaining might have provided an opening for such a union strategy much as the Wagner Act did for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s and 1940s. By 1900, most states had mechanisms in place to promote strike mediation but they had little effect on strike activity. Virtually no employers sought state mediation; few accepted it when proffered, and most rejected collective bargaining.<sup>55</sup> Aware that employer intransigence threatened their program, some reformers and union leaders urged that state agencies be given the power to compel employers to negotiate or accept arbitration. Ten years of unsuccessful voluntary mediation led one observer to write in 1897: "Since voluntary methods do not accomplish the work, and there is no immediate prospect of their doing so . . . the question is simply, *strikes* or *labor courts*."<sup>56</sup> Complaining that the new State Board lacked the power to compel employers to recognize organized labor, a Massachusetts union leader warned in the Boston *Labor Leader* that "It has been a subject of serious consideration as to whether compulsory arbitration will not be eventually a necessity." Following his suggestion, the Boston Central Labor Union soon included compulsory arbitration as one of its top four goals for the next session of the state legislature.<sup>57</sup> Despite this interest, measures to promote compulsory arbitration were not enacted for another forty years. Only in 1935 did the Wagner Act require employers to conduct "good faith" collective bargaining, and this requirement contributed to a powerful surge of union growth.

Electoral institutions also narrowed the options for radical politics in the United States, especially after 1896. The peculiar circumstances that gave organized labor political leverage in the 1880s disappeared by the mid-1890s with the establishment of a new electoral regime labeled the "system of 1896" by political scientists. Rising labor militancy and the Populist revolt led America's industrial and political elite to mobilize and to unite to defeat challenges from below and their new-found unity led to virtual one-party rule, by the Republicans

in the North and the Democrats in the South. The new regime included restricted suffrage to minimize lower-class voting, and reduced competition between the two main political parties.<sup>58</sup> The new electoral regime remained until the Great Depression system except only for a brief period of enhanced electoral competition in the 1910s when a progressive-conservative split in the Republican party restored competitive conditions in many northern states, creating a political opening that would allow organized labor to press successfully many of its political demands. In other elections, declining major-party competition reduced the importance of swing voters and supporters of independent labor parties.

Democrats undermined Southern populism by disfranchising blacks and poorer whites at the same time northern Republicans purged the electoral rolls of many urban workers.<sup>59</sup> Restrictive registration rules reduced voter turnout precipitously after 1896, from nearly eighty percent in presidential elections 1876–1896 down to sixty-five percent in 1900–1916.<sup>60</sup> The sharpest declines were among the urban and foreign-born working class.<sup>61</sup> Turnout declines, furthermore, were exacerbated by the collapse of the Knights of Labor with its program of labor unity and radical political action.<sup>62</sup> Ideological democrats bemoaned the decline in turnout, but turnout declines were a special problem for independent radicals who, as we saw above, drew disproportionate support from marginal voters.

Disfranchisement and the decline in political competition between the two major parties removed major sources of leverage that unions and labor activists had exercised on the American polity. Combined with the declining strength of radical labor unions, it is unclear whether one should explain the lack of independent radical politics or its persistence.

## NOTES

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1. See, for example, the classic works of Clinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1960), 3, 8, 54–65; and V. O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* 4th ed. (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1964), 210. Also see David Mazmanian, *Third Parties in Presidential Elections* (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1974); and Seymour Martin Lipset, “American ‘Exceptionalism’ in North American Perspective: Why the United States has Withstood the Worldwide Socialist Movement,” pp. 107–62 in E. M. Adams, ed., *The Idea of America: A Reassessment of the American Experiment* (Cambridge, Mass., Ballinger, 1977).

2. For examples of labor-based third party activity, see Kevin Boyle, “Little More than Ashes: The UAW and American Reform in the 1960s,” pp. 217–38 in Boyle, ed., *Organized Labor and American Politics, 1894–1994* (Albany, SUNY, 1998); Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881–1917* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998); William B. Hesseltine, *The Rise and Fall of Third Parties: From Anti-Masonry to Wallace* (Washington, Public Affairs Press, 1948); Fred E. Haynes, *Social Politics in the United States* (Boston, AMS, 1924); Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War: With Special Reference to Iowa: A Study in Social Politics* (New York, Russell & Russell, 1966 [reprint of 1916 edition]); Peter Rachleff, “The Failure of Minnesota Farmer-Laborism,” pp. 103–120 in Boyle, ed., *Organized Labor and American Politics*; David Reyn-

olds, *Democracy Unbound: Progressive Challenges to the Two Party System* (Boston, South End Press, 1997); Norman Thomas, *A Socialist's Faith* (New York, Norton, 1951).

3. One independent third-party did break through to become a major political force: the Republican Party of the 1850s. But the Republicans were formed as a national *second* party after the collapse of the northern Whigs. Never a third party, the Republican case is the exception that proves the rule that third-party activities are doomed to electoral failure.

4. Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* 2nd edition (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

5. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, *Third Parties*, 18.

6. Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus, *Third Parties*, 18.

7. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* tr. by Barbara and Robert North (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1954), 226.

8. This discussion uses the language of Duverger, *Political Parties*, 226.

9. Hesseltime, *The Rise and Fall of Third Parties: From Anti-Masonry to Wallace* (Washington, Public Affairs Press, 1948), 9; Fred E. Haynes, *Social Politics in the United States* (Boston, AMS, 1924), 155.

10. Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War: With Special Reference to Iowa: A Study in Social Politics* (New York, Russell & Russell, 1966 [reprint of 1916 edition]), 470.

11. The only time the Republican candidate received a lower vote share was in the Bull Moose election of 1912.

12. See, for example, Mary Blewett, *Constant Turmoil: The Politics of Industrial Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

13. John Swinton in *John Swinton's Paper* (Oct 26, 1884), 1.

14. James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington, D. C., Brookings Institution, 1983), 124, 154.

15. Robert Werlich, *'Beast' Butler: The Incredible Career of Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler* (Washington, D. C., Quaker Press, 1962), 10.

16. In an early argument for efficiency wages, he said that Massachusetts mills would be able to pay higher wages for fewer hours of work because they will attract the best employees and increase productivity; Robert Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler* (New York, MacMillan, 1954), 11–2.

17. Notice posted in Hamilton Corporation (Lowell), quoted in Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler*, 12.

18. On Butler's career, see Hans Trefousse, *Ben Butler: The South Called Him Beast* (New York, 1957). Also see, David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York, 1967). The quote from a workers' petition is from Mollam, "Butlerism," 202.

19. Butler to S. W. Hopkinson quoted in West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 378.

20. Holzman, *Stormy Ben Butler*, 212.

21. Commenting on an earlier Butler campaign, quoted in David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 370–1.

22. Butler's Governors Address was reported in the Boston newspapers Jan. 4, 1883. Also see, West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 373–4.

23. Butler's address to the Democratic convention was widely quoted at the time and since. See, for example, West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 388.

24. Hoping that he would attract working-class voters from Cleveland, the Republicans paid some of Butler's campaign expenditures. Angry at Cleveland, New York's Tammany Hall leader also contributed to Butler's campaign. See, for example, West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 394. For another view of Butler's campaign finance, see Werlich, *'Beast' Butler*, 154. The quotes are from Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, 150.

25. Quoted in West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 403.

26. John Swinton in *John Swinton's Paper* (November 2, 1884), 2.

27. Campaign address August 12, 1884; quoted in West, *Lincoln's Scapegoat General*, 396.

28. Howard P. Nash, Jr., *Third Parties in American Politics* (Washington, D. C., Public Affairs Press, 1959), 163; Mark A. Lause, *The Civil War's Last Campaign: James B. Weaver, the Greenback-Labor Party & the Politics of Race and Section* (Lanham, Maryland, University Press of America, 2001), 126.

29. For examples of labor's support for Butler, see the address by George McNeill to a

Butler rally at the opening of his headquarters in Boston; *Boston Herald* (September 1, 1884), 1. Also see the report of a GLP rally in Lowell, September 12, 1884; reported in Jean-Claude Simon, *Textile Workers*, 34.

30. *Boston Herald* (November 1, 1884), 3. This charge was repeated on an almost daily basis; see the *Herald* on October 26, October 27, and November 3. Irish Democratic leaders in Boston campaigned hard to hold down the Butler vote and boasted afterwards of their success; see Blodgett, *Gentle Reformers*, 15, 18.

31. This is estimated from regressions where the dependent variable is the number of votes cast for a party's nominee in 1884 and the independent variables are the number of votes cast in that town for the Democratic, Greenback, and Republican nominees in 1880 and the change in the number of votes cast in the town between 1880 and 1884. The regressions were estimated across 342 cities and towns in Massachusetts.

32. Proletarians in the KOL are eighteen percent more likely to vote for the GLP than are proletarian nonmembers.

33. Proletarians made up about thirty-five percent of voters. If all of the extra voters from the KOL were proletarians then the KOL impact on voter turnout among proletarians would be nearly three percentage points.

34. On the Knights of Labor and labor radicalism in the 1880s, see Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, University of Illinois, 1983); Richard Jules Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875–1900* (Urbana, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1986); Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1993); Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). On union membership in the 1880s, see Gerald Friedman, "New Estimates of United States Union Membership, 1880–1914" *Historical Methods* 32 (Spring 1999), 75–86.

35. *Bankers Magazine*, "Labor Troubles," 40:10 (April 1886), 723.

36. Henry Clews, "The Labor Crisis," *North American Review* 142 (June 1886), 599. Also see *Bankers' Monthly* 37:1 (July 1882), 2–3. Also see *Springfield Republican* (May 4, 1886), 4.

37. *Boston Evening Transcript* (May 24, 1886), 2.

38. Walker, "The Knights of Labor," reprinted in *Discussions in Economics and Statistics* (New York, 1899) 321–2.

39. See, for example, Charles W. Clark, "Compulsory Arbitration," *Atlantic* (January 1891), 34–44.

40. *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration* (Boston, 1881), 37, 171. As a conservative state senator, Wright had opposed the ten-hour bill restricting the workday. He was appointed to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in an attempt to limit the Bureau's support for labor radicalism. See Blewett, *Constant Turmoil*, 129.

41. In article ten of their program, the Knights of Labor called for the establishment of state systems of arbitration giving force of law to the arbitrators' decisions. In article twenty-two they call on employers to agree to arbitration; George E. McNeill, *The Labor Movement: The Problem of Today* (Boston, A. M. Bridgman, 1887); Jouselin, "Les Chevaliers du travail," *La Revue socialiste* 17 (January 1893), 544, 546. See, also, the statements in S. M. Jelley, *The Voice of Labor* (Philadelphia, 1888).

42. Daniel Joseph Ryan, *Arbitration Between Capital and Labor: A History and an Argument* (Columbus, Ohio, A. H. Smythe, 1885); AFL, *Report of Proceedings of the Convention . . . 1886* (Indianapolis, 1886), 7; George Groat, "Industrial Arbitration in New York State," *Yale Review* (February 1907), 413.

43. Raymond Bridgman, *Ten Years of Massachusetts* (Boston, D. C. Heath, 1888), 72.

44. Raymond Bridgman, *Ten Years of Massachusetts* (Boston, D. C. Heath, 1888), 78.

45. *Boston Herald* (May 23, 1886), 13; *Boston Evening Transcript* (May 24, 1886), 2.

46. *Boston Herald* (May 23, 1886), 13.

47. One of the other two had to be an employer; the third was to represent the general public. In practice, the labor member was chosen in consultation with the states' labor leaders.

48. A composite index of pro-labor voting in the state assembly has been constructed using two crucial votes on establishing the Massachusetts State Board of Arbitration: votes on establishing the board with investigative powers, and the vote on requiring that a board member belong to a labor union. Legislators were given a point for each vote that agreed with the KOL position, and a point was subtracted for each vote against the KOL position. (Consequently,

the “pro-labor” index ranges from  $-2$  for legislators who always voted against labor’s wishes, up to zero for legislators who were always absent or who split their votes, up to  $+2$  for those who always voted with labor.) The pro-labor side won on both issues by close votes; this is reflected in the average legislative pro-labor score of 0.0458, or only slightly above zero.

49. The regressions for the pro-labor voting index use ordinary least squares. In addition, logit regressions have estimated for each of the two votes separately. These results are qualitatively the same as the results presented here and are available upon request.

50. Among Democrats, the difference is somewhat smaller,  $+1.55$  for legislators from districts with a margin less than the GLP vote compared to  $+1.07$  for other legislators.

In general, Democrats were much more likely to support the bill than were Republicans and overwhelmingly supported labor’s position in the legislative jockeying around establishing a state Board of Arbitration . . .

51. In New York, for example, only six percent of the legislators elected in 1884 were from working-class backgrounds. The Federal House of Representatives elected in 1884 included only one worker of 371 members.

52. Quoted in Lause, *The Civil War’s Last Campaign*, 127.

53. Michel Branciard, *Syndicats et partis: Autonomie ou dépendence, I* (Paris, Syres, 1982), 18; Chris Cook and John Paxton, *European Political Facts* (London, MacMillan, 1978).

54. For the development of the Massachusetts Socialist Party, see Henry Bedford, *Socialism and the Worker in Massachusetts, 1886–1912* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1966).

55. The impact of state mediation on strike outcomes is discussed in Gerald Friedman, “Strike Success and Union Ideology, the United States and France, 1880–1914,” *Journal of Economic History* (March 1988), 1–27. Also see Gerald Friedman, “Worker Militancy and its Consequences: Political Responses to Labor Unrest in the United States, 1877–1914,” *International Labor and Working Class History* (Fall 1991), 5–17.

56. Prof. Frank Parsons, “Compulsory Arbitration,” 663. Also see Henry Demarest Lloyd, *A Country Without Strikes* (New York, 1902).

57. Boston *Labor Leader* (March 5, 1887), 4; Boston *Labor Leader* (November 26, 1887), 1.

The New York State Workingmen’s Assembly endorsed compulsory arbitration in 1888, dropping the demand only in 1897; see Groat, “Industrial Arbitration,” 415–16.

58. In Walter D. Burnham’s words, they converted America from “a fairly democratic regime into a rather broadly based oligarchy.” See his “The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe,” *The American Political Science Review* 59:1 (March 1965), 23.

59. See, for example, the discussion of disfranchisement in New Jersey in John F. Reynolds, *Testing Democracy: Electoral Behavior and Progressive Reform in New Jersey, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 137–67.

60. Burnham, “The Changing Shape,” 10.

61. Changes in registration laws in New Jersey, for example, led to a twenty percentage point drop in the percentage turnout in that state’s urban areas; see Reynolds, *Testing Democracy*, 150.

62. See Friedman, “Strike Success and Union Ideology” and *State-Making and Labor Movements*.