

INTRA-PARTY ORGANIZATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSE INSURGENCY, 1908-1910

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May 2012

“We are banded together for a single purpose and no other. Our sole aim as a body is to restore to the House of Representatives complete power of legislation in accordance with the will of a majority of its members. We are striving to destroy the system of autocratic control which has reached its climax under the present speaker.”¹

-- Resolution adopted by the Insurgent Bloc, 10 January 1910

1. CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTRA-PARTY ORGANIZATION

“I present a matter made privileged by the constitution!”² Rising from his seat, Representative George W. Norris of Nebraska strode past his Republican colleagues to the well of the House floor. Handing the waiting clerk a sheaf of papers, Norris turned to Speaker Joseph Cannon and demanded that his proposal be recognized. Though general House rules would normally have found the matter out of order, Norris cited Cannon’s ruling from the previous afternoon, wherein measures pertaining to the Constitution were granted privilege over regular House business.³ Given the Speaker’s recent ruling and the fact that his proposal regarded a matter explicitly discussed in the Constitution, Norris argued that the measure superseded existing legislation scheduled for consideration. In the Congressman’s own words:

It was the hour for which I had been waiting patiently. I had in my pocket a resolution to change the rules of the House. Unknown to anyone, even to my closest insurgent colleagues, I had carried it for a long time, certain that in the flush of its power the

¹ John Mandt Nelson, “Meeting Minutes,” 10 January 1910, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10. Responding to a smear campaign orchestrated by the Taft administration and Cannon’s allies in the legislature, Insurgent Representative Augustus Gardner of Massachusetts proposed the above resolution which was subsequently adopted by his colleagues to clarify the Insurgents’ relationship to the Republican Party.

² *Congressional Record*, 61: 3291.

³ *House Journal*, 61st Congress, 2nd Session, p. 437. On 16 March 1910, Census Committee chairman Edgar Crumpacker of Indiana motioned that a measure calling for a new census be debated on the House floor. Though under House rules Crumpacker’s proposal was unlikely to be considered, as the measure had only recently been reported to the full chamber and many more bills would first receive consideration, the chairman hoped his loyalty to the Speaker would tip the scales in favor of his motion. Sure enough, Cannon ruled Representative Crumpacker’s request to be in order. The Speaker declared: “Taking of the census as to population, [has] invariably been admitted as involving constitutional privilege, presenting a privilege higher than any rule of the House would give.”

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Cannon machine would overreach itself. The paper upon which I had written my resolution had become so tattered it scarcely hung together. That was the best evidence of long waiting for the minute that had come, and the frequency with which I had studied it alone in my office.⁴

As the clerk prepared to read the resolution aloud to the chamber, Cannon granted that if the matter was in fact privileged by the Constitution, then Norris had a right to present it. Whispers became shouts as House members learned the resolution would strip the Speaker of his power to sit on and appoint legislators to the Committee on Rules, the primary means by which majority party leadership controlled floor activity and managed the chamber body.⁵ Realizing the perilous position Norris had thus forced him into, Cannon sought delay as he mustered Republican supporters to vote down the rules change. Over the next several days the House debated the proposed resolution and Norris's right to introduce it, while the Speaker deliberated with his closest colleagues over the best course of action.⁶ Eventually, Cannon was forced to hold the Norris resolution to a vote, ever hopeful that the Republicans loyal to him and the Democrats whose favor he had traded for would outnumber the coalition rallied against him. In the end, however, an amended version of the Norris resolution passed, 191 to 156, and Cannon's dynasty as czar of the House Rules Committee came to a close.⁷

A legislative "breakpoint," the passage of the Norris resolution profoundly transformed congressional operation.⁸ Indeed, in an institution renowned for its continuity, the Cannon Revolt marks one of the few times in American history where the structure of Congress was substantially changed. Though the immediate effect of the 1910 revolt did not greatly compromise the majority party's control of House activity, it spurred a series of reforms that would lead to the long-term disintegration of traditional modes of partisan authority and the

⁴ George W. Norris. *Fighting Liberal: The Autobiography of George W. Norris*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945, p. 113.

⁵ The resolution provided a new structure for the Committee on Rules, requiring that the committee be geographically and politically representative. The new committee would consist of fifteen members, nine representing the majority party, and six the minority party, distributed throughout the entire country. The resolution also denied the Speaker the right to appoint himself or other members to seats on the committee, as appointment power would be allocated to the newly constituted Committee on Rules. Norris, p. 115.

⁶ Kenneth W. Hechler. *Insurgency: Personalities and Politics of the Taft Era*. New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1964, pp. 70-71.

⁷ The amended resolution stripped the Speaker of his seat on the Rules Committee, but allowed him to retain appointment power to other standing committees. These amendments were made by Norris and his fellow reformers to secure Democratic support for the proposal.

⁸ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek. *The Search for American Political Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 10.

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creation of new patterns of legislative governance.⁹ At the level of mass politics, the successful pursuit of parliamentary reform points to the challenge and capacity for partisan and legislative institutions to respond to sectional pressures. For these reasons, scholars have rightfully pursued a rich understanding of this episode of legislative change. Such accounts, however, tend to underplay the dynamic examined in this paper: the role of intra-party organization in structuring the Cannon Revolt, and, more broadly, in shaping congressional development.

Privileging Intra-Party Politics

Who holds the balance of power in Congress? Whereas institutional features of the Senate tend to limit majority control of the upper chamber, political scientists generally agree that the House is majoritarian, for the vote of a majority on either substantive or procedural grounds is decisive. Because the majority party, by definition, constitutes a majority of members of Congress, they can, by working together, leverage the majoritarian nature of the House to their collective benefit. Cox and McCubbins have argued that this sort of cooperation amounts to “cartelized” control of the chamber’s agenda and procedures. In their view, members of the majority party agree to locate control of “agenda-setting offices” in the leadership of the party. Party leaders, in turn, use these offices to further the preferences of the majority coalition, while preventing attempts to fracture the coalition with alternative proposals. In practice, Cox and McCubbins argue that only those proposals favored by the leadership of the majority party should come to a vote on the chamber floor.¹⁰ Krehbiel, however, disputes the extent to which the majority party is fully able to cartelize the legislative agenda. In his view, at least some influence over the chamber’s agenda is lodged at the floor median. If dissatisfied by any given proposal put forward by the majority party, this individual may choose to side with the opposition, thereby granting it majority status. Aware of this possibility, majority party leaders condition their proposals on the preferences of the median member, even when doing so leads to a suboptimal outcome from their perspective. For Krehbiel, the pivotal role of the median member extends even to procedural considerations.¹¹ Striking a middle ground, Schickler and Rich condition the relative influence of the floor median on matters of procedure on the size and ideological homogeneity of the majority party. In their view, the majority party member at the floor median can exert maximum influence when she is included among a “sufficient number of

⁹ Joseph Cooper and David W. Brady, “Institutional Context and Leadership Style: The House from Cannon to Rayburn,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (1981), p. 416.

¹⁰ Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins. *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party in Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 20-30.

¹¹ Keith Krehbiel. *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 165-172.

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party dissidents to constitute a permanent majority should they ally with the minority party.”¹² With such a slim majority, party leaders have limited incentive to punish the floor median should she defect on an individual vote, for fear she become a permanent defector. As a result, it is only when party leaders control a sizable and unified majority that they can exert the sort of legislative control that Cox and McCubbins describe. Nevertheless, Schickler and Rich agree that, to the extent that majority party leaders can offer their membership inducements to cooperate as a coalition or threaten them with punishment for recalcitrance, even more centrist members of the party are subject to control.

In debating the nature of majority party control, these authors make a related set of assumptions about the floor median. In adopting a spatial logic, both Cox and McCubbins and Krehbiel conceptualize the floor median as a single actor. For their part, Schickler and Rich imply that the floor median is either a single individual or a group of individuals at or near the median acting with singular purpose — that is, the dissidents will choose to defect from the majority party *en masse* or not at all. In this essay, I argue that these assumptions are, at minimum, not always met. Following Schickler and Rich, I observe that it is often the case that majority party leaders must contend with a collection of dissident members located at or near the floor median. Furthermore, I suggest that, in spatial terms, these members may be closely concentrated -- or “clustered” -- such that among them no one individual is necessarily pivotal to chamber outcomes in instances where some but not all of these “median members” are required to maintain a majority coalition. When combined with the prospect of partisan “carrots and sticks,” these related insights reveal a collective action dynamic that has yet to be fully understood.¹³ Stated succinctly, individual members located at or near the floor median have an incentive to let their peers “do the work” of defection, and themselves accept a side payment (or simply avoid punishment) in exchange for holding the party line. In this view, even though dissidents share a common interest in getting the majority leadership to compromise on any given policy or procedural matter, each individual may be better able to maximize her personal gain through cooperation with party leaders, provided that sufficient numbers of her colleagues successfully defect and thereby moderate the policy or procedural outcome.¹⁴ In short, the ideal outcome for any individual is to “free ride” on the defection of others. Even when members share the same policy or procedural interest and are committed to bearing the burden of

¹² Eric Schickler and Andrew Rich. “Controlling the Floor: Parties as Procedural Coalitions in the House.” *American Journal of Political Science* 41:4 (1997) 1340-1375.

¹³ As Cox and McCubbins (2005) observe, “Potential defectors must *coordinate*, not just in the sense of jumping at the same time but also in the sense of negotiating, *before* actually defecting, with their prospective new partners over the division of spoils,” p. 31.

¹⁴ In some instances, it may be sufficient to simply threaten defection until compromise is induced.

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defection, a related coordination problem develops: members may not be able to agree on exactly how to pursue or define that policy or procedural interest.¹⁵ Party leaders can exploit this weakness further, co-opting certain proposals as necessary to maintain a floor majority.

Given the potential for division and disorder among co-partisan dissidents, organization is imperative. Intra-party organization enables legislators to commit to a common strategy and in banding together on a course of unified action, limit the threat of partisan punishment.¹⁶ Intra-party organization also creates a hierarchy such that a group of dissidents can credibly negotiate with majority and minority leaders. Finally, intra-party organization can promote members' electoral prospects which, in turn, recommits individuals to their colleagues, cause, and organization. In these three ways, intra-party organization offers a powerful scaffolding from which dissident majority party members can negotiate desirable policy and procedural outcomes at the expense of their party leaders. Developing this further, I anticipate that a lack of parliamentary positions offering dissidents access to modes of institutional leverage -- such as committee chairmanships -- intensifies the need to create an alternative organizational arrangement. More broadly, I argue that assessing the quality of intra-party organization is critical to understanding why certain partisan factions -- including Progressive Republicans, mid-century Dixiecrats, and contemporary Blue Dog Democrats -- have been decisive actors in congressional politics.

Intra-party Organization and Pivotal Politics

In contrast to contemporary accounts of the Cannon Revolt that depict Norris as a pivotal political entrepreneur, this paper focuses on the structural conditions that facilitated the congressman's success.¹⁷ Specifically, I draw attention to the efforts of Norris's allies, "Insurgent" Republicans, to develop an intra-party organization with formalized procedures, membership, and structure. As I argue in the following pages, absent such organization, it is improbable that individual reformers would have successfully designed, introduced, and passed

¹⁵ As I explore in the following narrative, party members who ostensibly shared the same goal -- parliamentary reform -- were deeply divided over its substance and the strategies to be pursued.

¹⁶ I use "intra-party organization" to refer to an internally bounded alliance between co-partisans with an institutional apparatus. To unpack this definition further, by "internally bounded," I mean that groups have an identifiable membership and that participants are required to meet certain criteria set forth explicitly or implicitly by the organization. In addition, intra-party organizations are characterized by some of the following organizational features: members identify publicly with the group and meet together regularly, members agree to hire staff for the group, members devote financial resources to the group or seek financial resources for the group, members consent to be bound by a group position or strategy on one or more policy or procedural issue.

¹⁷ For example, see Adam Sheingate's "Creativity and Constraint in the U.S. House of Representatives" in Mahoney and Thelen's *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency and Power*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 168-203.

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new procedures to govern chamber activity. Organization within Republican ranks furthered three objectives essential to challenging Speaker Cannon and reforming House rules. First, formal intra-party organization enabled reformers to coordinate strategy amongst themselves and to offset and minimize the cost of their disloyalty to the Republican party. Second, by promoting group cohesion, intra-party organization improved the reformers' capacity to negotiate with the Democratic opposition, as well as with leaders of their own party. Third, intra-party organization promoted reformers' electoral prospects by rallying constituent support for the group's agenda, stoking animosity towards their opposition, and soliciting and disbursing campaign assistance to vulnerable members. In sum: had Republican reformers -- among whom Norris was one -- failed to develop such an organization, revision of House rules would have been all but impossible to achieve.

Denied traditional modes of parliamentary and political influence, such as committee chairmanships or party leadership positions, Republican reformers searched for an alternative institutional scaffolding from which to advocate revision of House rules.¹⁸ As I demonstrate in the essay, the structure of the so-called "Insurgency" developed incrementally, as members struggled to balance their strong sense of individualism and diverse convictions with the need for disciplined action. After finding informal means of coordination insufficient to bind members to a common objective and strategy, the Insurgents worked to institutionalize their presence -- devising a series of mechanisms to ensure consistent participation, cohesive strategy, and individuals' electoral and political security. Coordination among Republican reformers rendered them better able to resist and counter the considerable electoral and parliamentary pressures exerted on them by the Speaker and his allies in the White House. In addition, once the organization had solidified, the Insurgent bloc was able to secure the durable alliance with congressional Democrats necessary to achieve a majority in favor of parliamentary reform.¹⁹

In tracing the course of Insurgent organization, I hope to persuade the reader that one cannot attribute the reformers' success to the sheer size of the progressive Republican contingent.

¹⁸ In the 60th Congresses, five Insurgent members chaired standing committees. Henry Allen Cooper of Wisconsin chaired the Committee on Insular Affairs; Augustus Gardner of Massachusetts chaired the Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions; Halvor Steenerson of Minnesota chaired the Committee on Militia; William Hepburn of Iowa chaired the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce; Charles Fowler of New Jersey chaired the Committee on Banking and Finance. In 1909, however, Cannon stripped Fowler, Gardner and Cooper of their chairmanships due to policy disagreement. And Hepburn, having chosen not to run for office in 1908, lost his chairmanship as well. In sum: at the height of the Insurgents' formal organizational efforts, only one member chaired a standing committee -- one with no jurisdiction for rules reform. Lacking chairmanships from which to steer progressive legislation to the floor or leverage concessions from the Speaker (by holding up Republican bills in committee), the Insurgents sought an alternative means to pressure Cannon to relinquish control of House procedure.

¹⁹ Though the Insurgents constituted a sizable faction within the Republican party, reform would necessitate a floor majority -- and thus the Democratic minority was integral to the reformers' plans.

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Though, taken together, the progressive Republicans constituted a bloc of votes sufficient to grant the Democrats majority status if the reformers were to secede en masse from their party coalition, it was only through organization that the Insurgents could assure collective defection and play a pivotal role. Over time, learning from failure and success, the Insurgents added layers of organization to implement this strategy of collective defection and to make use of the leverage it brought them. In light of Insurgent machinations, a view of history that privileges the entrepreneurial foresight of George Norris in successfully challenging Speaker Cannon is flawed on two counts. First, the resolution Norris offered on the floor of the House in 1910 was for all intents and purposes the *same* resolution that the Insurgent bloc drafted and passed in 1909. Second, the strategic opening Norris saw in Cannon's ruling on constitutional privilege echoed a tactic proposed and considered by the Insurgent Sub-committee on Procedure in 1909.

More broadly, I argue that the Insurgent organization represents an effort to create a *pivotal bloc* out of a group of legislators whose individual views and actions would be otherwise peripheral to party leaders looking to build or maintain a majority coalition. With a House body of several hundred members, any one reformer was unlikely to hold the vote that would tip the balance of power from a Republican majority opposing rules change to a cross-party coalition favoring parliamentary reform.²⁰ In part, this was because Speaker Cannon and his allies had a range of opportunities and resources with which to secure the necessary number of votes without winning the support of any one dissident party member. Absent a guarantee that their's would be a pivotal vote to leverage, individual insurgents in pursuit of parliamentary reform were at the mercy of the Republican leadership. In this view, the influence of party dissidents like George Norris and his Insurgent colleagues hinged on their collective capacity to hang together in sufficient numbers to hold the balance of power in the chamber -- in effect, to organize all potentially pivotal votes into one bloc essential to sustaining the majority party coalition. Having secured a pivotal role in maintaining their party's coalition, group members could more credibly negotiate with chamber leadership and, in some instances, freely defect from party ranks.

Sources of Evidence and Paper Organization

In the following paper I trace out the development and strategic benefit of the Insurgent bloc as it formed in the House at the turn of the 20th century. This narrative account exploits a diverse set of archival records: the personal papers of Insurgent legislators and Republican leaders in Congress and the White House, period newspapers and the collected papers of

²⁰ Cox and McCubbins, p. 31.

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Progressive era journalists, and materials published in the *Congressional Record* and *House Journal*. In the House, these records reveal a highly organized, electorally mobilized bloc -- complete with a consistent membership, an internal committee structure with rules and procedures for developing Insurgent strategy and policy objectives, and a sweeping network for members to provide and receive electoral support.

In detailing the substance and development of Insurgent strategy, I rely on the organization's internal records: including meeting minutes, proposed resolutions, and attendance logs. These materials were collated and maintained by Representative John M. Nelson of Wisconsin, appointed by his colleagues to act as secretary for the Insurgent organization. Certainly, Nelson's selection as secretary demonstrates some pre-existing interest in and capacity for the kind of detailed administrative tasks required by the Insurgent organization. Nevertheless, I can discern no evident bias in Nelson's materials: his records reveal attentiveness both to the successes and limitations of the organization. Though these records provide the best available account of the bloc's internal workings, including the thought processes and preferences of its membership, I also draw on Insurgent correspondence where possible to verify and contextualize the data.²¹

As the paper unfolds, the reader will no doubt observe that the scope of inquiry widens at certain stages of the empirical account to include a discussion of legislative-executive interaction. The rationale for this analytic move is twofold. First, from an empirical perspective, the inclusion of the president at certain moments in the narrative reflects the reality of the historical record. Indeed, the archival record demonstrates that executive involvement proved to be an intermittent, yet crucial, element in the contest between Insurgents and Republican leaders in Congress. Second, from a theoretical perspective, in light of the critiques leveled at "institution by institution" accounts of American politics, I deliberately adopt an inter-institutional perspective where appropriate; that is, when the executive branch is implicated by the available archival evidence.²² In so doing, I hope to offer a more comprehensive treatment of Insurgent organization and Republican mobilization to police irregularity in the party's ranks.

Where relevant, I also introduce other salient actors in the progressive Republican constellation, including the editors of popular progressive Republican newspapers and

²¹ Included in the Nelson papers are a series of transcribed interviews of the Congressman conducted by Kenneth Hechler as part of his research for *Insurgency: Personalities and Politics of the Taft Era*. Attentive to concerns of potential bias, I primarily use these interviews to contextualize the information provided by the bloc's meeting minutes.

²² Paul Pierson, "The Costs of Marginalization: Qualitative Methods in the Study of American Politics." *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2007), pp. 145-169.

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magazines. These popular press outlets were an important source of both support for the Insurgent organization and of vocal opposition to “Cannonism.” In large part, such publications served as the link between the elite-level politics that I explore in this paper and the broader electoral politics of the time. However, the relationship between the Insurgent organization and their journalist colleagues is, from a political science perspective, causally complex. The historical record reveals that Insurgent leaders often communicated with progressive Republican editors, and sought to influence coverage of both the Insurgency and Cannonism. These efforts were in large part successful. This success notwithstanding, the newspaper editors were, for their part, independently committed to parliamentary reform. As a result, it is problematic to argue either that the Insurgents were fully responsible for the coverage they received, or that the coverage they received is an entirely independent variable that influenced the reformers’ ultimate success. Given this dynamic, I let the archival record speak for itself, observing only that Progressive publications proved an important resource for Insurgent legislators, and that with the cooperation of sympathetic journalists, certain electoral and organizational objectives were advanced.

In the following section, I briefly describe the political and economic conditions that precipitated Insurgent unrest and the lower chamber’s revolt against Speaker Cannon. I then detail the development of the House Insurgent organization and provide a theoretical lens through which to understand the group’s strategic logic. In so doing, I pay particular attention to the reasons for which Insurgents sought to organize, why particular institutional mechanisms were selected over others, and to what effect. I also document members’ increasingly adversarial relationship with the Republican political machine, and the latter’s punitive measures. To conclude, I revisit the fateful series of events that led to Cannon’s downfall, tracing out how the Insurgent bloc made George Norris’s entrepreneurship possible and how the organization was later adapted to accommodate new Progressive causes. In a related paper, I explore the development of Insurgent organization in Senate.

2. PRECIPITATING UNREST

In his early years as Speaker, Cannon’s drive to centralize party leadership and consolidate it in House institutions was met with little resistance from the chamber’s Republican and Democratic membership. Using the same tools vested in the speakership that others had used to build up the power of that office, Cannon extended his control over committee and floor

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activity.²³ Coupled with his strategic post as chairman of the Committee on the Rules, Cannon could fully regulate the flow of legislation, debate, and amendment -- blocking those bills he opposed, while expediting the passage of those he favored. As Schickler argues, these changes initially proved advantageous to House members. "Republicans benefited as Cannon worked with Roosevelt to pass popular legislation and avoid divisive issues," assuaging party infighting for a time. Likewise, House Democrats and Republicans collectively benefitted from the chamber's increased clout and prestige in intra- and inter-branch negotiations.²⁴

Regrettably for Cannon, his pursuit of legislative and partisan control ultimately ran afoul of the agrarian crisis smoldering in the western regions of the country. In the years following the Civil War, the railroads' penetration into western territories and innovations in agricultural science and machinery encouraged residents to devote their resources and acreage to agricultural production.²⁵ Newly settled in the region, Union veterans were the backbone of farm expansion, supplying the human capital necessary to cultivate the increased acreage.²⁶ To afford the machinery that would make it possible to grow and harvest sufficient crops for railroads to transport to meet eastern demand, farmers required additional financial capital. To acquire such capital they mortgaged their land -- which often resulted in permanent debt, as well as enmity toward the eastern companies that supplied farmers with mortgages.²⁷ Agrarian debt was compounded by the appreciation of the dollar's purchasing power as crop prices fell.²⁸ At the same time, farmers faced exorbitant prices on machinery and equipment because these industries were protected by a series of domestic tariffs. Limited banking facilities led to increased interest

²³ Following a pattern of congressional leadership pioneered by former Speaker Thomas Reed, Cannon placed members of Congress loyal to him in committee chairmanships and packed supporters into key committees, often displacing more senior independent Republicans. He also tightened the rules of recognition on the floor, refusing to grant recognition to members who had not explained their intentions to him in advance. Randall Strahan. *Leading Representatives: The Agency of Leaders in the Politics and Development of the U.S. House*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

²⁴ Eric Schickler. *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 70.

²⁵ The vast majority of Insurgent members of Congress hailed from the mid- and far-west: California, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Washington and Wisconsin. A minority of Insurgents represented districts in the mid-Atlantic and New England: Maryland, West Virginia, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

²⁶ Many Union soldiers took advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 to move westward at the close of the Civil War. As veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic, they were confirmed Lincoln Republicans, proclaiming "Vote the way you shot!" Their increased presence in Western states assured Republicans control of the region.

²⁷ Gretchen Ritter. *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865-1896*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

²⁸ Over-production of agricultural commodities, once encouraged by advocates of western settlement, led to falling prices.

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rates, aggravating further the plight of the debtor.²⁹

Faced with the loss of property and savings, farmers demanded relief from their state and national governments. At the state level, politicians -- foremost among them, Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette -- responded by wresting political control of the region from railroad and corporate interests.³⁰ At the national level, William Jennings Bryan and his Populist Democrats, along with progressive Republicans, pressed for further regulation of the railroads, conservation, postal savings banks, more equitable taxation, and direct democracy.³¹ Cannon, however, refused to accommodate the restive constituencies agitating for nationwide economic and political reform. Firmly allied with eastern finance capital and industrial interests, the Speaker found the reformers' agenda of governmental activism unacceptable. Unwilling to alter the status quo or yield to Republicans who advocated principles that ran counter to strict party regularity, Cannon used the tools of his office to rebuff efforts to pass reformist legislation. However, as Schickler writes, "By constricting the opportunities for individual members ... to shape House decision making, Cannon created an explosive situation where members were willing to attack the House to effect change."³² Indeed, without the institutional means to meet their constituents' demands for assistance, Republican reformers trained their sights on the parliamentary rules and procedures of the House chamber they believed to be impeding their efforts.³³

3. DEVELOPING INSURGENCY: 1908-1910

The development of the House Insurgency demonstrates both the difficulties and

²⁹ For more on the grievous economic circumstances that rooted the political movements of the time, see Richard Bense's *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877-1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

³⁰ According to Insurgent Representative John M. Nelson, "Bob La Follette was the moving force behind this great fight to reform the rules of the House of Representatives, insofar as it is possible to single out one man who provided the inspiration for a great deal of the movement. It must of course be recognized that no one individual had control over the progress of the movement, nor was any one individual responsible for the crystallization of the discontent in the first rules revolution of March of 1910, yet La Follette provided much of the impetus." John Mandt Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson" (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 1.

³¹ While Populist Democrats were often more radical in their demands than progressive Republicans (and Insurgents), both movements called for similar reforms -- with the exception of currency. Progressive journalist William Allen White described the difference between the two groups: "The Insurgents caught the Populists swimming and stole all of their clothing except the frayed underdrawers of free silver." Hechler, p. 21-22.

³² Schickler, p. 71.

³³ The western Progressives were joined by a handful of representatives who, by some accounts, believed parliamentary reform would either ease the passage of their favored legislation (George A. Pearre and Charles Fowler) or promote "good government" more broadly (Augustus Gardner). Blair Bolles. *Tyrant from Illinois: Uncle Joe Cannon's Experiment with Personal Power*. New York: Norton & Company, 1951, p. 174-175.

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imperatives of congressional intra-party organization. Galvanized by the failure of lone and independent action to bring about parliamentary reform, the Insurgents sought first informal and then formal organization as a means to achieve their collective aim. The following narrative traces the Insurgency's germination from its formative moments in 1908, through the trials and triumphs of organization in 1909, culminating in the bloc's participation in the March 1910 revolt.

The Problem of Individual Effort

During the 60th Congress (1907-1909), the first calls for parliamentary reform were made by the men who would prove the mainstays of the Insurgent organization.³⁴ Frustrated by Cannon's steadfast refusal to entertain western legislators' private appeals for programmatic relief in their home states, progressive Republicans John M. Nelson of Wisconsin and Victor Murdock of Kansas repeatedly spoke out against "the immense power concentrated in the Speakership."³⁵ Though their speeches garnered considerable favor from President Theodore Roosevelt, reform-minded Representatives and Senators of both parties, and members of the press, they cost both men politically.³⁶ Hardly content to turn a blind eye to the 'slings and

³⁴ The period prior to Joseph Cannon's tenure as Speaker did not lack objection to House rules. In 1902, for example, Representative Francis Cushman (R-WA) railed against the chamber's repressive legislative calendar, arguing that House rules enabled party leaders to push through some legislation by arbitrary procedure for partisan or personal benefit. "The Calendar!" he cried, "That is a misnomer. It ought to be called a cemetery. For therein lie the whitening bones of legislative hopes." *Congressional Record*, 55: 2: 1953-4. However, scholars generally characterize the speeches leveled against House rules prior to the Insurgency as disorganized and polemic. In contrast, Insurgent speeches were typically dispassionate and analytic.

³⁵ *Congressional Record*, 60: 1649 and 60: 2837. In most instances, Nelson and Murdock were granted recognition to make their speeches during floor debate on appropriations bills, where it was House custom for members "to speak on any subject under the sun." Nelson explains that the custom for wide recognition when considering appropriations legislation on the floor acts "as a device to give the members a chance to make speeches for home consumption, and to ease up the tension caused by the powers that be, giving them no chance to speak on bills that are really under consideration." John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 12.

³⁶ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 13. Roosevelt's relationship with the Insurgents varied considerably over time. Early in his term as President, Roosevelt vowed to work with Cannon to push through the Republican agenda. In doing so, he achieved a momentary detente with the House leader. When it became clear that Cannon was intent on obstructing the progressive legislation Roosevelt had made the linchpin of his *own* agenda, the President's relationship with the Speaker cooled. By late 1907, Roosevelt sought to straddle the cleavage between growing public opposition to Cannon in the West and the need to maintain a cohesive Republican majority for President-elect William Howard Taft. While he would later be a vigorous proponent of the Insurgent cause, as an elected official Roosevelt proved largely diffident to the organization -- refusing, at one point, even to make introductions to Taft on the group's behalf.

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arrows' of parliamentary reform or the breach in party regularity, Cannon "vowed vengeance."³⁷ From Cannon's perspective, it was a relatively simple and routine matter to punish individual dissenters. The Speaker shunted Nelson to dead committees and threatened Murdock through the Kansas Republican machine.³⁸ Although both men objected to Cannon's actions, neither could muster an effective response to lessen or counter the penalty's toll.³⁹

Of greater import, Nelson and Murdock were ill-equipped to overcome the peculiar procedural features of the House that effectively precluded rules reform. Parliamentary reformers faced at least three different procedural obstacles. First, the Speaker controlled the right to recognition, severely constraining a legislator's opportunity to mount a protest on the House floor. Second, if the Speaker were to grant recognition and a legislator were to introduce an amendment to reform House rules, the Committee on Rules -- packed with members loyal to the Speaker -- would rightfully have jurisdiction and almost certainly bury the proposal.⁴⁰ Third, were the Committee on Rules to report the resolution to the floor (a very improbable scenario), a single legislator would be unlikely to have the capacity to forge the cross-party coalition necessary to win passage. As Hechler observes, Nelson and Murdock would come to see, the "reason the Insurgents needed to throw up a connected series of breastworks was their failure to achieve any results through haphazard individual effort."⁴¹

The Limits of Informal Organization

In March 1908, mindful that the institutional environment necessitated some measure of coordination, Nelson circulated a petition calling "for a change in some of the rules" among like-

³⁷ Nelson recounts: "I found out that this speech was sent to Uncle Joe Cannon by an obliging enemy. He only laughed and said that everybody took a knock at the rules, but just the same he never forgave me for it, as I found out afterwards." John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes, Part Two (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10.

³⁸ As Nelson explains, "The Cannon crowd vowed vengeance and I got no favorable committee assignments. I was placed upon the Election Committee, No. 2, the Committee on Arts and Expositions, and the dead Committee on Pacific Railroads." John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes, Part Two (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10. Indeed, the *Congressional Record*, 60: 426-427, reveals Nelson's poor committee assignments. Murdock's punishment is detailed in Victor Murdock to William Allen White, 9 December 1909. Container 2, William Allen White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁹ Cannon's determination to exact retribution should not be taken as an indication that the reformers posed a credible threat to the Speakership. The institutional impediments to rules reform made it incredibly unlikely that the men would achieve their objective.

⁴⁰ James Schoolcraft Sherman to Col. H.L. Swords, 6 February 1909. Box 17, File 1909 Feb, 6-7, James Schoolcraft Sherman Papers, New York Public Library Rare Books and Manuscript Division, New York City.

⁴¹ Hechler, p. 194.

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mindful Republicans.⁴² The purpose of the petition was twofold. First, the reformers needed to identify potential colleagues with whom to collaborate. Though some, like Norris, approached Nelson and Murdock following their speeches in the House, others sympathetic to the cause were cautious to vocalize their support. Second, the early Insurgents sought to commit fellow-reformers to action; the petition would act as a contract between members to press for substantive change. For Nelson, “this was the beginning ... of the insurgent movement,” but on reflection it would prove to be a slow start.⁴³ Without a clear sense of what “change in some rules” entailed, and lacking a plan to guide the reformers’ efforts or any means to enforce the petitioners’ pact to prioritize the matter, other concerns took precedence. In the West, surging populist sentiment forecasted a strong Democratic year, with Bryan leading the ticket. With the 1908 presidential election in full swing, members of the Republican Party -- insurgent and regular alike -- were pressed into service on party-nominee Taft’s behalf. While conceding the necessity of rules reform, without a means to compel their commitment, the Insurgents attended to electoral matters instead.

The results of the 1908 election gave the Insurgents much to celebrate. The Republican Party maintained its majority in the House, 219-172, and Progressive losses were few. Swept in by the tide of western opinion inimical to Cannon’s rule, a new cohort of legislators swelled the Insurgents’ ranks. As seen in Figure 1, though the majority of Insurgents hailed from midwestern states -- seven from Iowa, five from Kansas, four from Nebraska and Minnesota apiece, three from Ohio, and nine from Wisconsin -- roughly a third of the membership drew from eastern and western delegations, including Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, California and Washington state.⁴⁴ Were the thirty-odd Insurgents to join with House Democrats, the Republican leadership would lose majority control of the chamber, making parliamentary reform possible.⁴⁵ However, building a cross-party coalition would require a level of

⁴² John Mandt Nelson, “Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 13-14.

⁴³ Sitting behind Nelson just after he had delivered his speech for parliamentary reform, Norris leaned forward and promised the congressman: “John, I’ll be with you on that.” John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Though sectional divisions would rankle Progressives a short decade later, there is little archival evidence to suggest that a single state delegation dominated Insurgent proceedings in the House. Indeed, while the Wisconsin delegation boasted the largest state membership in the Insurgent organization, leadership positions were not distributed in a way to favor that delegation in particular. The Wisconsin delegation’s principle influence came insofar as members from Wisconsin typically supported more radical reform measures, and voted cohesively in their favor. However, Wisconsin members’ capacity to dominate the substance of Insurgent proposals was limited by the reticence of some eastern reformers -- whom the Insurgent leadership were unwilling to alienate.

⁴⁵ At the time, the House numbered 391 members. Because a majority in the House required 196 members, twenty-four Insurgents would need to cooperate with the opposition to overpower Cannon’s regime.

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organization and commitment to cooperation the Insurgents lacked. Indeed, the loose federation generated by Nelson's petition was insufficient to compel adherence to a common plan or strategy.⁴⁶

Though they agreed to the necessity of parliamentary reform, the Insurgents remained divided over its substance. In letters and impromptu conversations on the floor of the House, members entertained a variety of strategies they hoped would best achieve legislative accord. Miles Poindexter of Washington and Charles Fowler of New Jersey argued that removing the Speaker from his seat on the Committee on Rules would be sufficient to end the House dictatorship. Among those who believed autocratic committee assignments to be the source of legislative discord, William Hepburn of Iowa suggested the Speaker be confined to fill only one-third of each committee's seats. Others argued this would unduly restrict the majority party; the Speaker should appoint three-fifths of all seats. Norris, however, proposed that the Speaker be stripped of the power of appointment altogether. Still others viewed restrictions on recognition as the source of Cannon's authority; some proposed changes to the legislative calendar, such that weekly, committees were given the opportunity to introduce legislation on the floor. Rules to discharge legislation from committees -- in the form of petitions or other procedures -- were favored as alternatives.⁴⁷

Nor could the Insurgents reach agreement on more practical matters of political strategy, as evidenced by their haphazard effort to challenge Cannon for the speakership. Indeed, upon returning to Washington in November 1908, many Insurgents worked at cross-purposes with each other -- promoting a crowd of names to oppose Cannon -- rather than throw their combined support behind a consensus candidate.⁴⁸ Correspondence between Insurgents reveals a host of competing ambitions, as individuals sought to solicit support for themselves or regional allies for

⁴⁶ Hechler, p. 45 and Miles Poindexter to Norman Hapgood, 17 November 1908. Container 8, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

⁴⁷ Hechler, p. 45. "Hepburn May Contest," *The Washington Post*, 2 December 1908, pg. 1. Miles Poindexter to Theodore Burton, 10 November 1908. Container 8, "A" Special Correspondence, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington. Miles Poindexter to W. H. W. Rees, 24 November 1908. Container 8, Correspondence "P" and "Q," Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington. Norris, 135.

⁴⁸ While it is possible that the Insurgents believed that Cannon would almost assuredly be reelected and consequently there would be little value in devoting resources to a unified campaign, correspondence between Insurgents suggests otherwise. Indeed, letters reveal that members believed speed of entry into the race was the primary variable in determining a rival candidate's success. Miles Poindexter to Norman Hapgood, 17 November 1908. Container 8, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

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the office.⁴⁹ With his opposition well divided, Cannon had little to fear.⁵⁰

Cognizant that prolonged internal wrangling would jettison their cause, a formal meeting was called to devise a cohesive strategy for the bloc.⁵¹ As Nelson recounts, “All those Republicans whom we believed favored a change of the rule [were invited to attend] ... we found that they numbered about thirty-five.”⁵² However, persuading those amenable to rules reform to broach the issue outside of the Republican caucus and attend a ‘renegade conference’ proved difficult. Potential Insurgents feared the consequences of open participation in a group that sought to defy the Speaker, for it was common knowledge that harsh punishment had been meted out to previous party dissidents.⁵³ Answering these set of concerns represented the Insurgency’s first real organizational challenge. A solution presented itself when, after some discussion, Representative Hepburn volunteered to host the Insurgent meetings in his committee room. Though a “dyed-in-the-wool machine man on other issues,” Hepburn believed strongly in the

⁴⁹ While insurgent Charles Fowler of New Jersey flooded the mail with pleas for support in his bid for the speakership, western insurgents busily mobilized around local candidates. Charles Fowler to Miles Poindexter, 6 November 1908. “A” Special Correspondence, Container 8, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington. Miles Poindexter to Charles Fowler, 14 November 1908. “A” Special Correspondence, Container 8, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington. William Ewart Humphrey to Miles Poindexter, 7 December 1908. “A” Special Correspondence, Container 8, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

⁵⁰ With the Insurgents divided, Cannon sought to clinch his control of the speakership for another term by persuading the White House to remain neutral on the matter. Cannon had some reason to fear that either President Roosevelt or President-elect Taft would intervene on the Progressive’s behalf, as the Speaker had proved a liability in the West. Dispatching his close confidant, Vice President-elect James Sherman, to speak with Taft and Roosevelt, Cannon soon convinced the White House that interfering in the House would derail the party’s capacity to implement its legislative agenda. Yet unbeknownst to progressive members of Congress, Taft withdrew his support of the budding insurgent cause. Hechler, p. 44. Shortly after the 1908 election, Representative Miles Poindexter wrote to President-elect Taft, urging him to consider supporting the bid of a progressive Republican to replace Cannon as Speaker. Taft did not respond. Miles Poindexter to William H. Taft, 10 November 1908, Container 8, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

⁵¹ As Hechler observes, “Political strategy should have dictated a firm cohesion as the prime necessity of the Insurgents, but they failed to come to any agreement and thus lost much of their bargaining power.” Hechler, p. 45.

⁵² John Mandt Nelson, “Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 14. Other counts, including that of Hechler, hold that the group numbered no more than twenty-five.

⁵³ One local Kansas politician counseled Victor Murdock against breaking with Cannon, even for the sake of pleasing his constituents: “As you will have ‘Uncle Joe’ on your neck up there -- stay with him, we will protect your rear.” J.A. Burnette to Victor Murdock, 23 December 1908, Container 21, Folder B, Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. However, for some would-be Insurgents, Cannon’s penchant for punishment motivated their recruitment. Nelson explains, “I won Gussie Gardner over to our side in the fight on the Rules, by pointing out to him the injustices which Cannon had done to him personally, in the way of removing him from his committee chairmanship.” John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 5.

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importance of parliamentary reform and the decentralization of power away from the Speaker.⁵⁴ His party orthodoxy on all other matters meant that Hepburn's patronage of the Insurgent cause reassured would-be participants that their involvement would not impeach their Republican credentials. Moreover, as an established figure in the Republican hierarchy, the Congressman's presence offered cover for Insurgents apprehensive about Cannon's possible response.⁵⁵

Securing Formal Collaboration

Meeting in Hepburn's committee room in early December 1908, it was agreed that the first step must be to define the scope and nature of the parliamentary reforms the Insurgents would collectively pursue. To this end, the group elected a regionally and politically diverse sub-committee, led by Hepburn, to identify and prioritize the possible changes to House rules.⁵⁶ The following week the Insurgents reconvened to hear the sub-committee's report. The committee argued that House committee assignments and the legislative calendar ought to be the first targets for reform. First, the sub-committee proposed that the House appoint a committee of nine members whose duty it would be to make assignments to standing committees.⁵⁷ Second, to ensure that legislation flowed freely from committees to the floor of the House, two free days ought to be allocated each week when the Speaker would be required to call the committees to report out legislation.⁵⁸ By instituting these "calendar days," the reformers hoped to increase floor access for lesser committees.

In subsequent meetings in January 1909, the Insurgents debated the merits of the sub-committee's report and the substance of its proposals. While the group agreed on the importance of reforming committee assignment procedure, members divided over how drastic the change should be. Hard-line reformers like Norris insisted that the Speaker be explicitly stripped of his power to assign committee seats, whereas others believed party leaders ought to work together

⁵⁴ According to Nelson, "In many caucuses, Hepburn would arise and read the riot act to Uncle Joe, but when the vote was taken and afterward, Hepburn would inevitably submit to the party steamroller and remain regular." John Mandt Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson" (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 3.

⁵⁵ According to Murdock, "It was only through the use of the headquarters of Hepburn, a dyed-in-the-wool machine man on other issues, that most ... consented to attend." Hechler, p. 195.

⁵⁶ The committee consisted of William Hepburn of Iowa, Charles Townsend of Michigan, Henry Cooper of Wisconsin, Everis Hayes of California, and David Foster of Vermont.

⁵⁷ The text of the Insurgent proposal: "The House shall elect at the commencement of each Congress the following standing committees... The House shall select a committee of nine members whose duty it shall be to nominate to the House the proper number of Representatives and delegates to constitute the above committees."

⁵⁸ The text of the Insurgent proposal: "On each Tuesday and Thursday, the Speaker shall call the committees ... and such call shall not be omitted unless by a vote on the day the House shall consent to such omission." John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes: 16 December 1908," Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 1-2.

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with the proposed new House-appointed “committee on committees.” Ultimately, the bloc agreed with Norris, voting 18-5 in support of fully divesting the Speaker of appointment authority. In an effort to address what some western Insurgents believed to be the outsized influence of eastern industrial and finance capital interests within the Republican coalition, the reformers decided to make geographic representation an explicit part of their agenda. To this end, the Insurgents proposed that when appointing members to the Committee on Rules, each legislator’s regional affiliation be taken into account. Suspicious that the Speaker might continue to exert influence in this domain, Norris sought to imbue regional delegations with the authority to directly elect one representative apiece. He proposed to the Insurgents “that the Committee on Rules should be elected by the membership of the House from geographical divisions.”⁵⁹ In the end, it was decided that the Committee on Rules, with a mechanism in place to ensure that its membership would be regionally representative, would also assume the duties of the proposed “Committee on Committees” and assign committee seats.⁶⁰ Unlike concern over the role of the Speaker, which seemed to divide the Insurgents, prioritizing geographic representation proved to be an appealing and popular notion, as members from all states could stand to benefit from the explicit provision of their regional interests.⁶¹

Over the course of the winter meetings, the Insurgents developed a series of internal organizational procedures. For expediency’s sake, the group agreed to formally adopt the basic structure of the typical congressional conference. Committees would be created to manage discrete tasks, reporting their progress at regularly held member-wide meetings.⁶² Attendees would follow basic rules of parliamentary order and one individual would act as chair to settle disputes and keep matters germane. Though the duty of chair would rotate among members, Nelson was appointed permanent secretary of the House Insurgency. As secretary, Nelson was responsible for calling meetings, arranging meeting space, keeping detailed meeting minutes, and occasionally acting as whip for the group.

⁵⁹ John Mandt Nelson, “Meeting Minutes: 18 January 1909,” Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 1-2. Meeting minutes suggest that no further action was taken on the Norris proposal at this time.

⁶⁰ John Mandt Nelson, “Meeting Minutes: 26 January 1909,” Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 1-2. Members debated whether the Committee on Rules ought to be the same committee tasked with assigning committee positions, and whether members on either committee could simultaneously sit on a standing committee. In a series of close votes it was decided that the Committee on Rules would also assign committee seats, but that the proposed “Committee on Rules and Committees” would not preclude members from sitting on other standing committees.

⁶¹ One might reasonably argue that the Eastern Insurgents would stand to lose from a more equitable regional distribution of power in the House, as it was the East coast that monopolized House procedure in this period. However, this fact did not seem to concern the handful of Eastern reformers, who believed non-progressive Eastern interests limited their access to the chamber’s most powerful offices.

⁶² The Insurgents eventually formed a Committee on Procedure, a Committee on Publicity, a Committee on Recruitment, and a Steering or Executive Committee to direct the group’s strategy more generally.

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These organizational choices promoted two critical objectives. In part, these duties facilitated group efficiency: with logistics accounted for, members could focus on the business at hand. But, as Nelson explains below, these same features also furthered collective action, preventing individuals from shirking or “drifting back” to the Regular’s camp.

[I] kept very complete minutes of all of the meetings; Murdock once objected to this while I was reading the minutes, but I realized that only by recording every motion and speech could all of the members of our group be tied together and kept from drifting back. Another technique was to give certain people committee chairmanships to maintain their interest; thus Murdock was made Chairman of the Publicity Committee.⁶³

Nelson’s account makes clear the Insurgents’ attention to matters of organization as a means to structure consistent participation, ideological cohesion, and common strategy. Moreover, the Insurgents’ use of these party-like mechanisms to keep group members invested in their collective objective conveys a sort of institutional isomorphism between parties and constitutive intra-party organizations. Whereas it is probably not the case that intra-party organizations are simply “nascent parties within parties, seeking to pour new wine into old bottles,” the fact that Insurgent organizers looked to their party coalition for structural inspiration suggests a strong affinity between the two phenomena.⁶⁴

While anxious to bind bloc members together, the Insurgents nevertheless sought to preserve a degree of individualism. In so doing, the group tried to reflect in their organizational design a critique of the party structure they were seeking to reform, attentive to the potential contradictions of modeling their bloc on the centralized authority of the Republican machine. Indeed, as Hechler argues, in designing the bloc’s administrative arrangements, the Insurgents were keenly aware that “centralizing power and authority in one leader ... would be aping the very organization that they were fighting in the House.”⁶⁵ Although majority votes were deemed tolerable during internal debates over the substantive detail of the Insurgents’ proposed resolution, the majority would not be permitted to dictate how individual members would vote if the resolution were to reach the chamber floor. The Insurgents further refrained from implementing organizational mechanisms that would empower the group’s leadership to enforce collective behavior.⁶⁶ Rather, the Insurgents hoped, knowledge that unity was the bloc’s singular

⁶³ John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 7. Hechler, p. 196.

⁶⁴ James W. Ceaser. “Political Parties -- Declining, Stabilizing, or Resurging?” in *The New American Political System*, 2nd ed., ed. Anthony King. Washington: AEI Press, 1990, pp. 90-91.

⁶⁵ Hechler, p. 195.

⁶⁶ Victor Murdock to William Allen White, 1 August 1910. Container 4, William Allen White Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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point of leverage would be sufficient to motivate consensus and cooperation.⁶⁷ To facilitate continued consensus as the organization expanded in the new congress, the Insurgents carefully screened members of the incoming congressional class to discern those sympathetic to their cause. Representing western, midwestern, and eastern interests respectively, Everis A. Hayes of California, Victor Murdock of Kansas, and George Pearre of Maryland distributed literature on rules reform to newly elected Republican members of Congress, and corresponded individually with interested legislators to assess their “sympathy with its principles... and support of this movement.” In so doing, the Insurgents were able to identify and pursue those new members who were in large agreement with the substance of the organization’s desired reforms.⁶⁸

In the months that followed, the Insurgents met frequently to develop a strategy to win passage of their parliamentary reforms. As Ernest Pollard of Nebraska reported from the Subcommittee on Procedure, no way had yet been found to bring up the proposed rules changes for consideration *with* the Speaker’s consent. It might be possible, Pollard suggested, to offer “amendments to some proposed rule of the Committee on Rules, and then vot[e] to over-turn the decision of the Speaker.” Pollard believed that forcing a vote against the Speaker on a ruling at any time in the congressional session might be used to leverage certain concessions from the majority leadership. After considerable discussion of Pollard’s idea, the Insurgents agreed that “it would be unwise to do anything revolutionary.”⁶⁹ Better to wait for the opening of the new Congress in March 1909, when the rules would once again come up for adoption. Though the evidence is only suggestive, we might wonder whether Norris recalled Pollard’s proposal in March 1910 when he offered his own resolution on the House floor with the aim of over-turning the Speaker.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ John Mandt Nelson, “Meeting Minutes: 10 January 1910,” Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Miles Poindexter to Victor Murdock, 20 February 1909, Container 22, Folder “Poindexter, Miles” in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., William Paine Sheffield [newly elected Republican Representative from Rhode Island] to Victor Murdock, 16 February 1909, Container 22, Folder “Sheffield, William Paine” in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. and Irving L. Lenroot to Victor Murdock, 16 February 1909, Container 22, Folder “Lenroot, I.L.” Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶⁹ John Mandt Nelson, “Meeting Minutes: 8 February 1909,” Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

⁷⁰ In contrast to Pollard, Norris recognized that Cannon’s ruling on constitutional privilege provided an opening to bring his resolution to the floor. However, in Norris’s view, the critical factor was giving the House the chance to overturn the Speaker, thus devolving decision-making authority to the chamber body. “The entire membership knew with equal sureness that Mr. Cannon would sustain that point of order [against Norris’s right to propose his resolution], and that I would appeal at once. It was then up to the House to decide whether my resolution was in order, and whether the House desired to consider it.” Norris, pp. 115-116.

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Building Public Support

Though the majority of the Insurgents' formal conferences were devoted to debating the substance and logistics of procedural change, a sub-section of the group coordinated with their colleagues in the Senate to rally public opinion in favor of reform measures.⁷¹ Throughout the Insurgent campaign, reformers with strong ties to popular progressive Republican newspapers and magazines -- like Victor Murdock and Senator Robert La Follette, editors of such publications themselves -- worked together with sympathetic journalists outside the halls of Congress to "spread sentiment against the present House rules" and to dispel allegations made against the bloc by 'stand-pat' papers.⁷² As the campaign progressed, the Insurgents continued to exploit their relationship with Progressive editors to pursue an ancillary objective: holding delinquent bloc members accountable for their "wayward" behavior.⁷³ The relationship between legislative reformers and their journalist colleagues extended beyond matters of public opinion to substantive discussions of reform measures. In the House, Murdock corresponded regularly with the editors of *Success*, *Colliers*, and Roosevelt's *Outlook Magazine* on matters of Insurgent strategy and substantive policy questions.

Progressive editors, for their part, were independently committed to Insurgent principles and proved remarkably entrepreneurial in their crusade for parliamentary reform. Progressive newspapers and magazines routinely commissioned Insurgent members to write articles describing their activities in Congress and explaining the rationale behind their reform efforts.⁷⁴ They also encouraged their readership to write to Cannon, imploring the Speaker to acquiesce to

⁷¹ Although the House Insurgents received little counsel from their Senate counterparts on most aspects of their reform efforts, there is strong archival evidence that the two organizations coordinated on matters of press. Senator La Follette and Representative Murdock corresponded frequently to share news reports, material to be printed, and "story pitches." Even early on in the Insurgent campaign, the two chamber organizations worked closely together; in October 1908, La Follette wrote to Murdock urging the Congressman to run in his own paper Insurgent editorials previously printed in *La Follette Magazine*. F.W. Mackenzie [assistant editor of La Follette magazine] to Victor Murdock, 22 October 1908, Container 21, Folder M, Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁷² Charles F. Scott to Alex Butts, 14 November 1908, Container 21, Folder S, Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., Lawrence F. Abbott [President of *Outlook Magazine*] to Victor Murdock, 13 March 1909, Container 22, Folder "Abbott, Lawrence F.," Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., and Robert J. Collier to Victor Murdock, 10 March 1909, Container 22, Folder "Collier, Robert J." Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁷³ Indeed, when Insurgent Charles Townsend of Michigan expressed unease over some of the bloc's more radical proposals for reform -- concerns which ultimately led him to leave the group -- the Progressive press accused him of cowardice and of "desert[ing] to the speaker's forces." Though Townsend sought to rebuff such allegations, writing letters to Progressive editors to explain his behavior, the press continued to describe him as a man with little honor. "Is Mr. Townsend a Progressive?" in *The Patriot*, undated (December 1909), Container 23, Folder "Success Magazine" in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁷⁴ Henry J. Haskell [editor of *Kansas City Star*] to Victor Murdock, 20 December 1909, Container 22, Folder "Haskell, Henry J." Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

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the Insurgent cause. These efforts culminated in a campaign by *Success Magazine* to document public support for rules reform and opposition to the present speakership, with the intention of reporting such evidence to members of Congress. *Success Magazine* mailed ballots to 22,500 subscribers, asking recipients to vote on proposed rules reform measures and to evaluate Cannon and Taft's performance in office.⁷⁵ Completed ballots were to be returned to the magazine at the reader's expense for analysis. Amazingly, *Success* received over 18,000 completed ballots, along with hundreds of letters from readers articulating their views on parliamentary procedure, Speaker Cannon, and the Taft administration. Having compiled the results of this informal public opinion poll, *Success* consulted with Insurgent members "on the question of getting the largest possible influence on the figures by method of presentation to Congress."⁷⁶ Ultimately, the magazine submitted a report to each member of Congress and the White House -- as well as publishing the results in press. At a time when intercontinental correspondence was costly and modern public opinion polling had yet to exist, *Success Magazine's* national campaign was an impressive achievement. Moreover, it conveys the unique partnership between congressional reformers and their journalist colleagues, as progressive publications advanced certain of the Insurgency's electoral and organizational objectives.

Managing Insurgent Disunion

At the close of February 1909, the Insurgents sought to finalize the resolution they would present at the opening of the 61st Congress in March. Following months of revision, the final resolution denied the Speaker membership on any standing or conference committee, and expanded the size of the Committee on Rules to accommodate greater political and geographical

⁷⁵ The text of the *Success Magazine* ballot: "Please mail this ballot to SUCCESS MAGAZINE immediately... Answers to the questions below will be regarded by SUCCESS MAGAZINE as absolutely confidential as regards authorship. (1.) With what political party are you in general sympathy? (2.) For what Presidential candidate did you vote in November, 1908? (3.) Do you now believe that your vote was wisely cast? (4.) Are you satisfied with the first nine months experience in the administration of President Taft? (5.) Do you approve the position of Senator Aldrich in the recent tariff legislation? (6.) Do you approve the position of Speaker Cannon in the recent tariff legislation? (7.) Do you approve the position of President Taft in the recent tariff legislation? (8.) Is it your desire that President Taft should support and co-operate with Senator Aldrich and Speaker Cannon in the general public policies which they represent? (9.) Do you desire that he should oppose them? (10.) Who is your Representative in Congress? (11.) To what political party does he belong? (12.) Did he support Joseph G. Cannon for Speaker of the House, and in the fight on the rules at the beginning of the special session? (13.) Do you approve his position in the Speakership contest? (14.) Would you vote for him if there should be another election this month, provided that he were opposed by a reputable man of the opposite party? (15.) Is it your desire that he support the administration and policies of Speaker Cannon, or would you prefer that he oppose them?" Readers were asked to record their name, state, city or town on the ballot. "Questions to Success Magazine Members of Auxiliary Editorial Board," 1909, Container 23, Folder "Success Magazine" in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁷⁶ Edward E. Higgins to Victor Murdock, 3 December 1909, Container 23, Folder "Success Magazine" in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

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representation.⁷⁷ Members of the Committee on Rules and Committees would be selected by representatives grouped together into geographical regions, such that each region would select one legislator to join the Committee. Thus constituted, the Committee would appoint House members to all other standing committees. Additional provisions specified the details of the revised legislative calendar.⁷⁸ With only a few modifications, this resolution -- drafted, debated, and passed by the Insurgents in 1909 -- would be submitted to the House by Norris one year later.⁷⁹

Up to this point, the Insurgents had managed to balance the need for coordination and consensus with the preservation of individual opinion. The crucial vote to adopt the Insurgent resolution upset this hard-won equilibrium. Nelson's written whip count for the resolution reveals a growing reticence among a fraction of the Insurgent membership. Scribbling "cold foot" next to eleven names, Nelson identified a contingent of Insurgents who believed the proposed reforms to be overly broad and extreme.⁸⁰ The sudden reticence puzzled the Insurgent leaders. Why were members abandoning their commitment to parliamentary reform now that the resolution was drafted? Had they ignored the seeds of discord sown months before, only to see them bear fruit now? Nelson believed that the Insurgents' had long harbored a subset of members ultimately indifferent to rules reform. Murdock, instead, blamed the Regular Republicans, arguing that Cannon had coerced more vulnerable Insurgents -- legislators with sizable "stand-pat" constituencies, pending legislation before the House, or patronage requests for which Cannon's favor would be necessary -- to return to the "regular" party.⁸¹ In the end, twenty-nine Insurgents joined in signing the resolution, eight "cold foot" members voted for a resolution pertaining only to the legislative calendar, and six seceded from the group entirely.⁸² With its membership thus diminished, the Insurgents' successful pursuit of rules reform closely depended on the entirety of the Democratic minority voting in favor of the measure.⁸³

⁷⁷ The resolution created a "Committee on Rules and Committee to consist of fifteen members, nine of whom shall belong to the party having the largest representation in the House and six of whom shall belong to the party or parties having lesser representation in the House." John Mandt Nelson, "Feb. 1909 Resolution, Annotated," Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

⁷⁸ John Mandt Nelson, "Feb. 1909 Resolution, Annotated," Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

⁷⁹ John Mandt Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson" (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10.

⁸⁰ John Mandt Nelson, "Vote on Resolution of Feb. 9 & 10," Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

⁸¹ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 14.

⁸² Hechler, p. 46-47.

⁸³ At the close of the 60th Congress, the bloc of twenty-nine Insurgents required the full Democratic minority (167 members) to break the Republican majority (223 members), 196 to 194.

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The divisive vote proved to be a critical moment of recognition for the Insurgents. For Nelson and his colleagues, it was a reminder of the insufficiency of mere agreement on the group's broad goal of parliamentary reform. By design, the organization was ill-prepared to enforce discipline or voting regularity in its ranks. Unwilling to compromise individual autonomy with a binding majority vote, the Insurgents insisted that collective action be assured without coercive measures. Despite this, Nelson and fellow members of the Steering Committee concluded that they would need find ways to incentivize cohesion to prevent eleventh-hour defections in the future.⁸⁴ For others, the vote served to underscore the continued power of the party leadership and the corresponding weakness of the Insurgent organization to defend itself from the Speaker's incursion. Murdock, for one, recognized that Cannon could continue to weaken the organization by siphoning off individual members or small groups of members over time. Cooper shared Murdock's concern, believing that the Democratic leadership would not view the bloc as a credible ally for those same reasons.⁸⁵ And without the support of the Democratic minority, the Insurgents' revision of House rules would be impossible to achieve.

Negotiating Inter-Party Alliance

Despite the difficulty of this crucial internal vote on their hoped-for reform resolution, the Insurgents' coordination and resolve impressed the Democratic leadership. Initially concerned that the Insurgents would seek compromise with the Speaker, securing little for the minority party, the bloc's size and organization persuaded the Democratic leadership that a profitable alliance could be formed.⁸⁶ With their numbers combined, the Insurgent bloc and the Democratic minority would constitute a chamber majority capable of enacting parliamentary reform. In the days before the start of the 61st Congress, Minority Leader Champ Clark worked closely with the Insurgent Steering Committee -- Nelson, Augustus Gardner of Massachusetts and Edmund Madison of Kansas -- to form a joint plan of action.⁸⁷ The legislators agreed to press for the adoption of the Insurgent resolution during the perfunctory adoption of House rules at the opening of the new Congress.⁸⁸ If the Insurgency remained unified and the cross-party

⁸⁴ John Mandt Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson" (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Hechler, pp. 48-49.

⁸⁶ Schickler, p. 76.

⁸⁷ Hechler, p. 196. The historical record is unclear as to who initiated the cross-party coalition. According to Nelson, he and Gardner approached Clark through Texas Democrat Albert Burleson, while Clark claims he reached out to the Insurgents first. John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 16.

⁸⁸ Nelson explains the nature of the cross-party collaboration: "We only agreed to stand together on this issue and not on party policies generally." John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 16.

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coalition held, reform would be assured. If, instead, the Insurgents divided over the resolution on the floor, the Democrats made clear the consequence. Writing to Victor Murdock, Clark's clerk warned: "The Democrats will stand fast if the insurgents muster their forces ... if the latter lose their courage and fail that day, there will be no use for them to get Democratic aid later on."⁸⁹

Before the coalition could act, however, the Republican Regulars surprised the House by proposing a resolution to establish a legislative calendar akin to that favored by the eight "mild" Insurgents.⁹⁰ This had the intended effect of widening the breach between the militant Insurgents intent on stripping the Speaker of his power to appoint committees and the more moderate reformers who sought a limited intervention. Drawing laughter on the House floor, Murdock characterized the resolution as "a Trojan Horse ... and sticking out of the paunch of that horse I think I see several notable cold feet."⁹¹ Though the Democrats and Insurgent leaders denounced the resolution, members in both parties were hard pressed to oppose the Regulars' proposal. The eight men who preferred limiting rules changes to the legislative calendar sided with the Republican machine, along with two other "cold foot" Insurgents Nelson identified in his February whip count. Despite uniform Democratic opposition, the attenuated Insurgent bloc was too small in size to prevent the Regulars' resolution from passing by a small majority, 168-163.⁹²

Meeting in Hepburn's committee room following the vote, the Insurgents agreed that Cannon's victory made clear two facts. First, the Insurgent organization was ill-prepared to withstand an attrition of small concessions. Unless they could find a way to prevent the majority leadership from picking off the group's more moderate members, the bloc would cease to be pivotal. Second, Cannon's slim majority suggested the Insurgents' cross-party alliance might be sufficient to break the Speaker's hold on the House. Had the Insurgents or Democrats prevented three of their members from defecting, the Speaker's majority would have fallen.⁹³

This episode reveals at least two matters of theoretical import. First, as evidenced by

⁸⁹ Wallace D. Bassford [clerk for Champ Clark] to Edward Higgins (and forwarded to Victor Murdock), 9 March 1909, Container 23, Folder "Success Magazine" in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁰ The eight-man Insurgent resolution and the Regular Republicans proposal differed in two respects. One, the latter sought to make the calendar day for the call of legislation from committees Wednesday rather than Tuesday. Two, the Regulars wanted to allow the Calendar Wednesday to be set aside by a majority rather than two-thirds vote, as the Insurgents preferred.

⁹¹ *Congressional Record*: 60: 3570.

⁹² *Congressional Record*: 60: 3570. It appears the Democratic leadership determined that the Insurgents could not be held accountable for dividing over the 'concession resolution' as a matter of principle, because the mild Insurgents believed they were bound to support a proposal that contained what they perceived to be an important and necessary reform.

⁹³ Hechler, p. 49.

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Cannon's careful pursuit of "weak" reformers, it is clear that the Speaker considered a fraction of the Insurgent membership to be critical to maintaining a Republican majority. In this view, the moderate reformers Cannon targeted were pivotal to the policy outcome. Had they not defected from the bloc, the entire Insurgent group would have been pivotal as well, insofar as their unity would have assured Cannon's downfall. It also suggests that an intra-party group's degree of organization -- in this context, its capacity to withstand attrition -- is an additional factor to consider along with Schickler and Rich's observation that the size of a centrist bloc is a crucial variable in explaining the extent to which the majority party will concede to moderate demands.⁹⁴

Second, Cannon's tactical concession to fracture the Insurgent bloc speaks to the danger of co-optation for intra-party organizations. By subsuming a relatively innocuous part of the Insurgent agenda into Republican doctrine, the Speaker forced the bloc into a quandary: either the Insurgents could require those members who would have been satisfied with Cannon's concession to hold out with their more radical colleagues for a more substantial compromise, or the organization could accede to its members' individual autonomy to vote as they saw fit. In either event, Insurgent cohesion would fray considerably. This dynamic suggests that co-optation may be an efficient expedient by which party leaders can weaken intra-party organization. However, the Insurgent case also implies two limits to the appeal of co-optation as a means to undermine intra-party organization. As the preferences of the "weak" members of the intra-party organization diverge farther from those of party leaders, the larger the concession the latter will need to offer to break the formers' allegiance to the bloc. And, to the extent that an intra-party organization's radical members keep more moderate concessions off the bloc's agenda, the less appealing co-optation will appear as a strategy at the disposal of party leaders.

Neutralizing Partisan Punishment

Anxious to further fracture the Insurgent-Democratic coalition before the House set to adopt new rules, Cannon and his deputies negotiated a series of back-room deals with a score of Democrats.⁹⁵ The Speaker awarded tariff favors, promised top committee assignments, and agreed to a few minor rules changes enhancing minority rights, to secure sixteen Democratic votes against the Insurgent-Democratic resolution amending House procedure, and another seven

⁹⁴ Schickler and Rich, p. 1341.

⁹⁵ Cannon negotiated deals with two separate factions of the Democratic Party. First, he promised tariff concessions on sugar and other commodities grown in Southern delta regions -- winning the support of South Carolina and Louisiana representatives. Second, the Speaker struck a deal with Tammany Democrats, offering several important committee positions in exchange for the group's support.

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defectors to enact Cannon's approved rules reform.⁹⁶ Using distributive politics to build an alternative cross-party coalition, Cannon effectually reallocated the pivotal votes from the Insurgents to the score of defecting Democrats.⁹⁷

As further insurance, Cannon petitioned President Taft for aid. The Speaker persuaded the President that the Insurgents' rules reform would destroy the machinery necessary to pass the upcoming tariff bill and other critical Republican legislation.⁹⁸ Confronting the Insurgent leadership in a meeting at the White House, Taft condemned the bloc for forming a coalition with the Democrats and forsaking party regularity. "As the head of the country, he could not connive with thirty or forty Democrats to overthrow the House Organization."⁹⁹ Though the Insurgents tried to assure the President that they had no intention of disrupting the passage of the tariff legislation, Taft remained unconvinced.¹⁰⁰ Leaving the White House, Nelson described the

⁹⁶ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 21-22. (See also Schickler, p. 76) According to *Success Magazine*, "Tariff changes were threatened against certain Southern Democrats as the price of their adherence to their party caucus. Valuable committee appointments and rich 'perquisites' were offered, and would have been instantly granted to any of the Insurgents or Democrats who would consent to leave his associates in the lurch... Threats of vengeance against those who held out were, of course, freely and vigorously made; the form which these threats took being, as a rule, the promised refusal of the Speaker to appoint a recalcitrant to any committee more important than that on 'Acoustics and Ventilation of the Capitol.'" "The Fight Against Cannonism" in *Success Magazine*, Container 23, Folder "Success Magazine" in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁹⁷ Nelson recounts that a reporter covering the Speaker's negotiations with the Democrats told the Insurgents: "When they [Cannon and his lieutenants] heard that you had eighteen men present they went into the air. They knew that there were enough who did not attend, being out of town, to make the twenty-four we needed... It was the next day that the Speaker's forces began to work on the Democrats." John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 20.

⁹⁸ Explaining his position to Progressive journalist and newspaper editor William Allen White, Taft wrote: "I have got to regard the Republican party as the instrumentality through which to try to accomplish something. When, therefore, certain Republicans decline to go into a caucus, and stand out 30 against 190, it would be the sacrifice of every interest I represent to side with the insurgents, however much sympathy I may feel with the principle in respect to the House rules that they seek to carry out. Very early in the campaign I thought of encouraging a movement to beat Cannon, but I found that he was so strongly entrenched [*sic*] with the membership of the House that that was impossible. I then tried to secure some modification of the rules, and I am not at all sure that if the Insurgents remained in the caucus we might not do something of the sort, because there were a great many in the caucus who sympathize with the principle; but the difficulty which the thirty insurgents are going to find, in my judgment, is that Cannon will be able to control enough Democrats to defeat them on the vote, and then they will be left utterly in the hole." William H. Taft to William A. White, 12 March 1909. Container 2, William Allen White Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁹ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Hechler, p. 51-53. Whereas Roosevelt had encouraged the fractious progressive elements in the Republican Party and resented Cannon's tariff policy, President Taft viewed the "test of Republicanism" as "compliance with the party platform." Cannon's expressed commitment to implement the Republican platform – as he professed to Taft: "I am willing to aid you to carry out the party's pledges" – merged the two leaders' interests. Archibald W. Butt. *Taft and Roosevelt: The Intimate Letters of Archie Butt, Military Aide*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1930, p. 303.

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group's newly-formed consensus on Taft: "We realized then that he was against us."¹⁰¹ Even the Democrats marveled at Taft's commitment to Cannon and the 'stand-pat' faction of the Republican Party. As the staff in Clark's office observed: "much pressure is being brought to bear by Cannon and his forces and by Taft, who has gone over bag and baggage to the reactionaries."¹⁰²

Taft's opposition to the Insurgent bloc fortified Cannon and offered new means to discipline the party's dissenting faction. Indeed, in the days that followed their fraught meeting with the President, the Insurgents found "the whole [A]dministration was brought to bear against us." The White House threatened to withhold patronage, the Republican National Committee promised to mount primary challenges and limit campaign assistance, and Senators from Insurgent states pressed their counterparts in the House to abandon the fight and rejoin the Speaker.¹⁰³

To the mutual surprise of the Republican and Insurgent leadership, the bloc proved remarkably resistant to the Administration's assault.¹⁰⁴ In part, the Insurgents' solidarity can be attributed to the support and encouragement of the Progressive press, who believed Cannon's reign to be a perversion of American democracy. The editors of *McClure's Magazine*, *Everybody's Magazine*, *American Magazine*, *The Outlook*, and *Collier's Weekly* -- national publications with some of the widest circulation in the country -- privately urged the bloc to continue fighting against "Cannonism."¹⁰⁵ In print, the editors excoriated the Speaker and ran in-depth features on the Insurgent members, extolling their efforts against Cannon and branding them American patriots. The close vote over the Regulars' legislative calendar further bolstered

¹⁰¹ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 18.

¹⁰² Wallace D. Bassford [clerk for Champ Clark] to Edward Higgins (and forwarded to Victor Murdock), 9 March 1909, Container 23, Folder "Success Magazine" in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹⁰³ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 18-19.

¹⁰⁴ As Nelson recounts: "Mr. Gardner, Mr. Madison, and myself agreed to stick to the fight but we wondered what the boys would do. One by one the boys dropped in or called up by telephone. I did not find one coward ... there were no cold feet in the crowd." John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ In a joint letter to the Insurgents, the editors state that their readership exceeds five million Americans across the United States. "News Endorsement," 1909, John Mandt Nelson Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10. Writing to Murdock, the editor of *American Magazine* promised: "Some of us periodical men are sending you a round robin of encouragement today by wire. All power to the elbows of you and your fellows in this fight." John S. Phillips [editor of *The American Magazine*] to Victor Murdock, 15 March 1909, Container 22, Folder "Phillips, John S." Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

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the Insurgents' resolve to hold together.¹⁰⁶ Unaware that Cannon had hastily forged a majority coalition of conservative Republicans and Democrats, the Insurgents believed themselves well-positioned to cast the deciding votes on rules reform.¹⁰⁷

On March 15 1909, the Insurgent bloc and Democratic leadership readied for a close -- but, they expected, ultimately victorious -- fight to adopt new House rules. Their hopes were dashed, however, on the rocks of Cannon's new alliance. After defeating the motion to readopt the old rules as planned, Clark proposed a modified version of the Insurgent resolution and moved for a vote on the proposition.¹⁰⁸ Although the Insurgents voted as a bloc in favor of Clark's resolution, the measure nevertheless failed, due to Democratic defection to the Cannon camp.¹⁰⁹ Following the failure of Clark's resolution, a Democratic defector introduced the rules proposal agreed to by the Speaker. The resolution generally preserved the status quo, but granted an extension of some minority rights.¹¹⁰ During debate over the resolution, the Insurgents met repeatedly to "conference," in a last-ditch effort to countervail Democratic defection.¹¹¹ Insurgent efforts notwithstanding, Cannon's distributive coalition held together and the measure passed, 211-173, despite uniform opposition from the bloc and majority of Democrats.¹¹² Frustrated by their loss, the Insurgents nonetheless took heart that their organization remained united throughout the battle.¹¹³ Had Cannon failed to reorient the party coalitions to create a new set of pivotal votes, the Insurgents would have controlled the twenty-one votes necessary to maintain the Republican majority and sufficient to turn the balance of power over to the Democratic leadership.

¹⁰⁶ It may be tempting to think that the Insurgents' greater cohesion is attributable to the group's improved ideological agreement -- having lost more moderate members to the Regulars. However, the substance of debates recorded in meeting minutes suggests that "radical" members were not homogenous in their preferences for parliamentary reform. Moreover, there was strong disagreement between the remaining Insurgents over the extent to which the bloc should cooperate with the Democratic minority. John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes," 10 January 1910, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

¹⁰⁷ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ The Clark resolution called for an expanded Committee on Rules and deprived the Speaker of the power to appoint committees, as the Insurgent resolution stipulated. But, the new resolution lacked the previous draft's legislative calendar provisions, as these had been passed in some form by the Regulars.

¹⁰⁹ *Congressional Record*: 61: 21.

¹¹⁰ The Cannon resolution provided for a motion to recommit for the minority party and required a two-thirds vote, rather than majority vote, to set aside Calendar Wednesday. Schickler, p. 76.

¹¹¹ Hechler, p. 197.

¹¹² *Congressional Record*: 61: 22.

¹¹³ John Mandt Nelson, "Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 22.

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Regrouping the Ranks, Rebuffing the Regulars

With the window for rules reform temporary closed, the Insurgents turned their attention to other policy matters. After considerable debate by the bloc's Steering Committee, the Insurgents voted unanimously to cease work on rules revision until the upcoming tariff bill was debated and passed. The bloc's consensus to give the tariff bill right of way did not reflect agreement on the issue itself. Gardner and more conservative members of the Insurgency were in strong support of the bill's swift passage, whereas "a few radical Insurgents wanted to use the threat of delaying the tariff as a club to force Taft to support the anti-Cannon movement."¹¹⁴ Determined to avoid fracturing the bloc over issues tangential to their primary cause, the Steering Committee opted to avoid policies with cross-cutting cleavages.

Contrary to existing accounts, however, the Insurgents did not cease their organizational efforts on rules reform completely.¹¹⁵ Throughout the summer months of 1909, the Insurgents turned their attention to the electorate, seeking to rouse public opinion against Cannon. Reaching out to sympathetic members of the press and pulpit, the Insurgents provided fodder for the widespread denunciation of the Speaker and his "corrupt system."¹¹⁶ The bloc's efforts to incite strong sentiment against Cannonism furthered three objectives. First, the group sought to counter the Regulars' threat to mount primary challenges in Insurgent districts by establishing a firm footing for their candidates in advance of the 1910 election.¹¹⁷ To supplement the work of the press, individual Insurgents campaigned on their fellows' behalf, writing letters and giving speeches in marginal districts and states across the country. Second, the Insurgents used "these powerful organs of public opinion ... to bring[] wayward members back into the insurgent ranks." As Nelson recounts, the Steering Committee "built fires underneath them through the newspapers in their districts, and induced certain of their constituents to bring pressure to bear

¹¹⁴ Hechler, 197.

¹¹⁵ Hechler argues: "Following the collapse of the revolt of March 15, 1909, the elaborate mechanisms which the rules revisionists had built up fell into disuse" (p. 197). However, meeting minutes from June and December and correspondence between members suggest the Insurgent organization did not shutdown. John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting at Lenroot's Room," 16 June 1909, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10. John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting at Hubbard's Room," December 11 1909, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10. William J. Cary to Miles Poindexter, 21 October 1909. Container 6, "C" Special Correspondence, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

¹¹⁶ Rufus Rockwell Wilson to Miles Poindexter, 7 October 1909. Container 9, "W--Z" Special Correspondence, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington. Schickler, p. 79.

¹¹⁷ Miles Poindexter to R.L. Farnsworth, 3 October 1909. Container 9, "F" Special Correspondence, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington. Miles Poindexter to Bartlett Sinclair, 27 October 1909. Container 9, "S" Special Correspondence, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

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upon them, and as a result they stayed with us.”¹¹⁸ Third, the shift in public sentiment prompted some Republican Regulars to consider “whether it would not be more expedient to support the Insurgent fight against Cannon.”¹¹⁹ The Regulars hoped that, by dropping Cannon and thus appeasing the Insurgents, the party might potentially present a more united front against Democrats in the 1910 elections. Public opinion was such that even Taft began to weigh the cost of his allegiance to the Speaker.¹²⁰ Ultimately, the Insurgents’ campaign lessened the Regulars’ capacity to criticize their efforts publicly and improved the bloc’s ability to remain unified and defray the political cost of their rebellion.

In the months following the Insurgents’ national offensive, the Speaker and his stand-pat allies persuaded Taft to join forces in punishing the party’s dissidents. Though the White House believed Cannon’s growing unpopularity to be a liability, the Speaker shrewdly exploited the President’s growing insecurity that his predecessor, Roosevelt, would use the Insurgency as a platform to challenge Taft for the 1912 Republican nomination. If Taft were unable to quash the Insurgency and unite the Republican Party, Roosevelt would have all the more reason to return to national politics.¹²¹ In consultation with the Speaker, Taft denied Insurgents patronage appointments and funded primary challengers in dissident districts.¹²² In the House, Cannon “cut off the heads of the [Insurgent] Republicans who had chairmanships,” assigning one to “the worst committee in the House - the Committee on Ventilation and Acoustics.”¹²³

Although scholars dispute the extent and efficacy of the Regulars’ disciplinary strategy, the historical record leaves little doubt that the Insurgents both experienced and feared Republican retribution.¹²⁴ Correspondence between House Insurgents suggests that “some fellows were worried a great deal about patronage,” others felt “the old machine crowd ...

¹¹⁸ John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Hechler, p. 63-64. Atkinson, pp. 76-78.

¹²⁰ Archibald W. Butt. *Taft and Roosevelt: The Intimate Letters of Archie Butt, Military Aide*. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1930, p. 222-223.

¹²¹ Butt, p. 256, 271-273.

¹²² “To Crush Insurgents,” *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*; Jan 5, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1994) pg. 1. “Without Quarter,” *Los Angeles Times (1886-1922)*; Jan 5, 1910; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881 - 1987) pg. 11. Joseph Bristow to William Allen White, 5 January 1910. Container 3, William Allen White Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²³ John Mandt Nelson, “Annotated Interview Notes (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 13 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 23.

¹²⁴ Keith Krehbiel and Alan Wiseman. “Joseph G. Cannon: Majoritarian from Illinois.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26:3 (2001) 357-389. Eric D. Lawrence, Forrest Maltzman, and Paul J. Wahlbeck. “The Politics of Speaker Cannon’s Committee Assignments.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45:3 (2001) 551-562.

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growing in activity,” and the leadership acknowledged “the risk of calling a meeting of the House Insurgents” when reformist “sentiment here is struggling against the fumes of Chloroform.”¹²⁵ Insurgent William Cary of Wisconsin confided to Miles Poindexter: “We are going to be punished for our stand... the ‘System’ is working hard ... and will spend plenty of money.”¹²⁶ Floor speeches and news coverage for the period corroborate these accounts.¹²⁷ Despite the assault, the Insurgents expressed a strong commitment to “fight it out,” even using the threat of punishment “to bind our group together even more tightly.”¹²⁸ While the bloc did not possess the means to prevent Cannon from levying punishment against them, they sought to offset its direct effect when possible; countering electoral interference, for instance, with Insurgent support to preserve members’ electoral security. Absent a means to counter an attack, the Insurgents used the act of punishment -- in their view, the exemplar of political corruption -- to rekindle the bloc’s commitment to reform.

Insurgency, Pivotal At Last

Having withstood the Regulars’ barrage, the Insurgents brought their coalition of pivotal votes to bear in the fight to control the appointment of the Pinchot-Ballinger investigatory committee. In January 1910, following allegations that Richard Ballinger, Taft’s Secretary of the Interior, had engaged in illegal activities to permit and conceal the sale of land slated for conservation, the House voted to determine whether it would investigate the matter. On January 7, as the chamber debated a resolution authorizing an investigatory committee, Norris offered an amendment requiring that the House elect the proposed committee’s members instead of the Speaker. The amendment carried, 149-146, with twenty-six Insurgents joining the Democrats to

¹²⁵ Nelson explains that not every Insurgent faced the same kind or level of threat: “Not very much pressure was exerted on me personally, although Casson, Watson and Babcock [Republic whips] told me adroitly and in a nice, joshing way what the consequences of my bolting would be. The regulars regarded men like Cooper and myself as definitely lost and not worth any amount of persuasion; they were interested in the weak fellows.” John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10. Victor Murdock to William Allen White, 27 December 1909. Container 2, William Allen White Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Victor Murdock to William Allen White, 9 December 1909. Container 2, William Allen White Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁶ William J. Cary to Miles Poindexter, 21 October 1909. Container 9, “C” Special Correspondence, Miles Poindexter Papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington.

¹²⁷ *Congressional Record*: 61: 3321. Addressing the House, Cooper described the Insurgents’ predicament: “If, in the House, a member votes against rules adopted by the caucus his political destiny is in the hands of the Speaker. He can be punished by the Speaker for voting against the rules adopted by a caucus ... [the Speaker] can punish them, discredit them in the eyes of their constituents, lessen their influence on this floor, coerce them into doing his will.”

¹²⁸ John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10.

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subdue Cannon's forces.¹²⁹ Meeting the next day, the Insurgents agreed that they would insist on the appointment of one of their own to the committee and would refuse to see Cannon's most loyal aides seated, as well.¹³⁰ Keen to avoid a public battle, Taft assured the Insurgents that their views would receive full consideration. The bloc succeeded in getting an Insurgent appointed to the committee, and when the Regulars' threatened to reject two of the Democratic nominees, the reformers forced a compromise.¹³¹ The size and resilience of the Insurgents' union privileged the group during negotiations with the President and Republican caucus and, in Gardner's words, gave the bloc "the advantage of trading with the regulars."¹³²

Over the next several weeks, the Insurgents continued to meet to discuss the results of the investigatory committee and the prospect for future rules reform. Concerned that the public might confuse their alliance with the Democrats and the group's involvement in the Pinchot-Ballinger affair with their primary, *Republican*, aim of parliamentary reform, the bloc agreed that in future, rules resolutions ought to be proposed by a Republican Insurgent. To make this distinction clear to the public, the Insurgents drafted a statement to be circulated in their districts explaining their "single purpose."¹³³ The bloc also considered strategies to counter Taft's renewed charge that the Insurgents sought to delay Progressive legislation with rules reform, debating how to "emphasize to the country that we were not obstructing...consideration [of such reform] but endeavoring to bring [it] up."¹³⁴ During discussion of rules reform, the Insurgents further debated the merits of expanding the Committee on Rules, but came to little agreement.¹³⁵ With "tacit agreement in our group that no resolution be sprung suddenly," the Insurgents settled in for the long wait to the opening of the 62nd Congress.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ *Congressional Record*: 61: 390.

¹³⁰ John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes, 8 January 1910." Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

¹³¹ Hechler, p. 64-65.

¹³² John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes, 8 January 1910." Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 2.

¹³³ John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes, 10 January 1910." Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 3.

¹³⁴ John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes, 31 January 1910." Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 2.

¹³⁵ John Mandt Nelson, "Meeting Minutes, 8 January 1910." Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 1.

¹³⁶ John Mandt Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson" (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10.

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An Unexpected Victory

“The break came before we expected it.”¹³⁷ On March 17, 1910, Norris submitted the resolution that would ultimately undo Cannon’s control of Rules Committee. By all accounts, Norris alone recognized that Cannon’s ruling on constitutional privilege provided a window of opportunity to present the Insurgents’ sought after parliamentary reforms on the House floor. Indeed, the Congressman’s astute procedural move caught his fellow reformers unawares. The substance of his proposal, however, would have been quite familiar to them: the so-called “Norris Resolution” was an amended version of the internal resolution passed by the Insurgent organization in 1909, outlining the substance of the group’s preferred rules changes.¹³⁸ Moreover, to secure passage of “his” resolution, Norris relied crucially on the Insurgency’s hard-won alliance with the Democratic minority. In short, the Congressman’s entrepreneurial efforts directly followed from the work and strategy of the Insurgent organization. And, as I hope to have persuaded the reader, had Republican reformers -- among whom Norris was one -- failed to develop a formal intra-party organization, revision of House rules would have been all but impossible to achieve.

As soon as it became clear to the House that Norris had struck a critical blow for parliamentary reform, bringing to the floor the Insurgent resolution, the Republican leadership sought to parry the Congressman’s procedural move. The Regulars objected, arguing that the Norris proposal ought not to fall under the Speaker’s expanded notion of privilege. In the debate that followed, the Insurgents marshaled their forces to defend the resolution and Norris’s right to propose it. In an effort to secure Democratic support, Poindexter began the Insurgents’ line of defense with the argument that rules reform “is of greater importance for the minority than it is for the majority.” To impress upon the House the necessity of limiting the Speaker’s power, Cooper called upon Murdock, Norris and Fowler to describe the punishment Cannon meted out as a consequence of their Insurgency.¹³⁹ Minority Leader Clark and his deputies endorsed the resolution and offered a litany of parliamentary precedents in support Norris’s view of constitutional privilege. Without sufficient votes on the floor to defeat the Insurgent-Democratic coalition, the Regulars frantically deployed members to corral those colleagues absent from the chamber. In an effort to obstruct this mobilization the Insurgents refused Republican demands

¹³⁷ John Mandt Nelson, “Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson” (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler),” 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 10.

¹³⁸ The Congressman had amended the proposal to reflect the passage of components of the reformers’ agenda that the Speaker had successfully co-opted. Specifically, Norris removed the provision establishing legislative calendar days.

¹³⁹ *Congressional Record*: 61: 3299.

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for a recess, badgering the House Sergeant-at-Arms to bar legislators from leaving the chamber on the grounds that a quorum be maintained.¹⁴⁰

Unable to immediately muster sufficient numbers to assure their majority, the Regulars were forced to negotiate with the Insurgent bloc and Democratic leadership to reach a compromise. Initially, the Regulars proposed that the Rules Committee be expanded to ten seats, with the Speaker retaining his seat on the committee. Adamant that the Speaker relinquish control of House rules, the Insurgents refused the plan. In the hopes of luring remaining moderate reformers from the Insurgent ranks, the Regulars offered a “gentleman’s agreement” that the Speaker would not sit on the new committee. Although this strategy had worked previously to divide the Insurgency when the Speaker co-opted their legislative calendar provision, the bloc’s moderate reformers rebuffed the Regulars’ efforts to breach their ranks. The Regulars returned with an offer to further expand the proposed committee to fifteen legislators, so long as the Speaker would remain a member. Again, the Insurgents insisted that Cannon’s removal from the Committee on Rules was non-negotiable. Hamstrung by the Speaker’s command that under no circumstances should his deputies capitulate on the matter of his committee membership, the Regulars had little choice but to yield to everything else -- agreeing to the entire Norris resolution, on the condition that Cannon remain on the Rules Committee. Pressing their advantage, the Insurgents leveraged their bloc of pivotal votes to win complete concession. If Cannon refused to relent, the Insurgents threatened, the bloc would give up negotiations and join the Democrats to pass the Norris resolution in its entirety. Summarizing the bargaining dynamic, one Regular lamented: “They didn’t offer us anything; I think we’ll be beaten.”¹⁴¹ Unwilling to believe that some favorable compromise could not be struck and ever hopeful that further delay would provide sufficient time to muster Republican supporters to vote down the rules change, Cannon insisted that negotiation continue.¹⁴²

Though in a strong position to bargain with the Regulars, the Insurgents were forced to modify the proposed resolution to meet Democratic demands. The minority leadership persuaded the bloc to strike the provision for the geographic selection of the Committee on Rules, and to reduce the size of the proposed committee from fifteen to ten members -- as the Regulars had initially suggested. While the Democrats conceded that the Speaker must be barred from sitting on the newly constituted Rules Committee, they stipulated that the Speaker’s power to assign members to other standing committees remain intact. Though the Insurgents opposed

¹⁴⁰ Charles R. Atkinson. *The Committee on Rules and the Overthrow of Speaker Cannon*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1911, pp. 106-107.

¹⁴¹ Hechler, pp. 70-72.

¹⁴² Bolles, p. 217.

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these changes, the bloc had little choice but to accept the Democrats' request. As Norris writes, "The Democrats knew their votes meant victory... we could not win this fight without agreeing to the Democratic proposal... as bitter as the dose was, we must take it."¹⁴³ In contrast to the Insurgents' pivotal status within the Republican coalition, the group lacked sufficient leverage to dictate the terms of the resolution to House Democrats. Without the minority party's votes, the Insurgents agreed, parliamentary reform of any sort would be impossible to achieve. While it is also true that the Democratic minority would get little reform without the Insurgent bloc, the Democratic leadership saw some advantage in preserving "Cannonism" as a campaign issue and, believing it possible to displace Republicans in the next election, was not entirely opposed to retaining mechanisms for majority party control. Indeed, the Insurgents believed there was some likelihood that Clark would renege on the reformers' cross-party alliance for just these reasons. In this view, the Insurgents' capacity to maintain their pivotal status and leverage favorable policy outcomes was crucially limited by the actions and incentives of the minority party.

Negotiations having deteriorated, Cannon accepted that he had little recourse but to rule that Norris's claim to constitutional privilege and his resolution were out of order. As all expected, with the Democrats and Insurgents voting solidly against the Speaker; Cannon's decision was overturned 182-163. Then voting on the amended resolution favored by the minority leadership, the House passed the rules change, 191-156.¹⁴⁴ As the last of the votes were tallied, the Insurgents congratulated themselves. Where haphazard individual effort had failed, intra-party organization won out -- empowering the Insurgent reformers to negotiate with leaders of both parties to extract policy more favorable than the status quo. Against all odds, they had successfully forged an alliance with the Democratic minority sufficient to overwhelm the Republican machine and force concessions on rules reform.¹⁴⁵

4. REVISITING THE SPEAKER'S FALL

Although the 1910 parliamentary reforms were more modest in scope and effect than their advocates had initially hoped, the Cannon revolt was nonetheless an extraordinary episode

¹⁴³ Norris, pp. 117-118.

¹⁴⁴ *Congressional Record*: 61: 3428. Joining the Insurgents were a score of formerly stand-pat Republicans -- legislators who had previously refrained from participating in the rules fight because of their unwillingness to break party bonds.

¹⁴⁵ As Schickler argues, however, the substance and outcome of this reform effort reflected the (at times) competing interests of the Insurgent-Democratic coalition. Though the Insurgents succeeded in removing Cannon from the Rules Committee, Democratic interests precluded further reform of the sort the bloc had initially pressed for. Schickler, p. 83.

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in congressional development.¹⁴⁶ In the face of a seemingly intractable status quo, Progressive members of the Republican Party devised an institutional arrangement powerful enough to overcome the Speaker's vast political machine and revise House rules. This much-revised account of the episode underscores the critical link between political entrepreneurship and intra-party organization, with the latter providing the necessary institutional scaffolding from which motivated members can innovate and drive processes of change. Moreover, the successful pursuit of parliamentary reform via intra-party organization suggests that formal organization of this sort may be a critical means of achieving responsive congressional and partisan institutions. In this view, the Insurgency functioned as a "pseudo-party," institutionalizing the Progressive elements of the national electorate within Congress and the confines of the American two-party system.

Between 1908 and 1910, the Insurgent reformers developed a set of mechanisms to ensure their consistent participation, cohesive strategy, and individual electoral and political security. In binding their membership to a common plan of action, the Insurgents were able to establish their sought-after alliance with the Democratic minority. Having secured cross-party cooperation, the reformers presided over a coalition sufficient to break the Speaker's hold on the House. As I argue in this paper, absent their organization, it is improbable that individual reformers would have successfully designed, introduced, and passed new procedures to govern chamber activity. Indeed, even a political entrepreneur of Norris's caliber depended upon the Insurgency's institutional scaffolding to provide the substance of and leverage to amend House rules. In this view, the Insurgent organization is a prime example of the strategic benefit and substantive influence of intra-party organization.

However, the Insurgents' reliance on the Democratic minority to pass rules reform suggests that intra-party influence is conditioned by an inter-party dynamic. Specifically, the extent to which the Insurgents were pivotal was bounded by their ability to credibly threaten to work against the interests of their own party by defecting to the opposition. Simply put: a legislator is pivotal only if he can threaten to leave, and a legislator can only threaten to leave if he can credibly work with the other party. Drawing from the Insurgent case, had the Democratic leadership expressed hostility to reformers' aims, the bloc would have had difficulty persuading the Speaker that their threat to ally with the minority was credible. Similarly, had Cannon been unwilling or unable to negotiate a series of deals with members of the Democratic party, he might not have succeeded in heading off rules reform at the opening of the 61st Congress.

¹⁴⁶ John Mandt Nelson, "Miscellaneous Interviews with John M. Nelson" (conducted and recorded by Kenneth Hechler)," 5, 6, and 7 February 1939, Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10, p. 11. Schickler, p. 81.

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Consequently, in understanding the conditions under which legislators are likely to influence their party's agenda, we must account for both parties' willingness to collaborate with their opposition's dissident membership. In this view, intra-party organization is motivated not just by legislators' desire to negotiate with their party leaders and to avoid partisan retribution, but also by their desire to signal to opposing leaders that they will be a reliable ally.

Though the reformers' intra-party organization fell into disuse in the immediate aftermath of the Cannon Revolt, the bones of the Insurgency were resurrected a decade later to serve similar ends. At the close of the 67th Congress in December 1923, progressive Republicans once again mobilized in favor of rules reform and in opposition to their party's choice for the speakership. Despite efforts by the Republican leadership to dissipate their resistance, the reformers demonstrated remarkable unity, opposing the Speaker in nine ballots on the chamber floor and forcing House leaders to allow full debate on rules changes in return for their votes. As was the case during their fight against Cannon, the reformers' success can be attributed to their organizational efforts. Just as their colleagues had a decade prior, the reformers' appointed a cadre of leaders to serve as the organization's vanguard and met regularly in conference to plan strategy and articulate the substance of their desired parliamentary changes. Perhaps not surprisingly, these efforts produced a similar political dynamic. Indeed, as Schickler argues, this "formal organization among the progressive Republicans enabled them to stay together through the long series of roll calls on the speakership, and to select leaders to negotiate a settlement."¹⁴⁷ Adopting more theoretical terms, we can observe that this second Insurgency proved successful precisely because the dissidents found a way to coordinate their defection and discourage potential free-riding.

In a subsequent paper, I contrast the organizational design of House Insurgency with that which developed in the Senate. In brief, I show that Senate reformers devised an organizational arrangement distinct from that of the House. Whereas House Insurgents necessitated a formal organization to facilitate collaboration and secure the group pivotal status, Republican reformers in the Senate developed a looser structural arrangement to coordinate their activities. I argue that this variation is due to differences in the size, parliamentary position, and institutional setting of each organization. The sum total of these factors gave rise to a collective action dynamic in the Senate distinct from that experienced by reformers in the House.

¹⁴⁷ Schickler, pp. 106-107.

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Figure 1: Original Insurgent membership by state delegation

Sources: “The Fight Against Cannonism” in *Success Magazine*, Container 23, Folder “Success Magazine” in the Victor Murdock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. and John Mandt Nelson, “Insurgent Attendance,” Wisconsin Historical Society, Wis Mss WK Box 10.

NAME	STATE	NAME	STATE
Everis A. Hayes	California	Andrew J. Volstead	Minnesota
Duncan E. McKinlay *	California	Edmund H. Hinshaw	Nebraska
Gilbert N. Haugen	Iowa	Moses P. Kincaid	Nebraska
William Hepburn	Iowa	George W. Norris	Nebraska
Elbert H. Hubbard	Iowa	Ernest M. Pollard *	Nebraska
James W. Good	Iowa	Charles N. Fowler	New Jersey
N.E. Kendall	Iowa	Herbert Parsons *	New York
Charles E. Pickett	Iowa	Asle J. Gronna	North Dakota
Frank P. Woods	Iowa	D.A. Hollingsworth	Ohio
Daniel R. Anthony *	Kansas	Leonard P. Howland *	Ohio
Philip P. Campbell *	Kansas	A.R. Johnson	Ohio
Edmund H. Madison	Kansas	David J. Foster *	Vermont
Victor Murdock	Kansas	Miles Poindexter	Washington
Charles F. Scott *	Kansas	William J. Cary	Wisconsin
George A. Pearre *	Maryland	Henry Allen Cooper	Wisconsin
Augustus P. Gardner	Massachusetts	James H. Davidson	Wisconsin
William C. Lovering	Massachusetts	John J. Esch **	Wisconsin
Charles E. Townsend *	Michigan	Arthur W. Kopp	Wisconsin
J.C. McLaughlin *	Michigan	Gustav Küstermann	Wisconsin
Charles R. Davis	Minnesota	Irvine L. Lenroot	Wisconsin
Charles A. Lindbergh	Minnesota	Elmer A. Morse	Wisconsin
Halvor Steenerson	Minnesota	John M. Nelson	Wisconsin

* = members labelled “coldfoot” in Nelson’s whip count and attendance log ** = prolonged absence
Rep. Scott, Anthony, Campbell, Townsend, McLaughlin, Pearre, McKinley and Foster left the Insurgency.

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