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The Making of the Democratic Party. The Emergence of the Party Organizations of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party, the British National Liberal Federation and the Dutch Anti-Revolutionary Party, 1860s-1880s

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V. The Role of Elections

1. The Illusion of Electoral Efficiency?

In 1886 the National Liberal Federation assistant secretary, Croxden Powell, summarized the then contemporary perception that the “National Liberal Federation’ (...) is the most powerful organization of the country.”⁶⁵³ For many British commentators, the NLF was the “new electoral power in the land.”⁶⁵⁴ This perception was strengthened by previous statements of NLF representatives like Henry Crosskey who proudly mentioned the “definite and distinct reputation,” which had impressed “friends and foes” alike.⁶⁵⁵ Also the political opponents of the NLF accepted its electoral success. For instance, the Conservative *Pall Mall Gazette* worriedly reported that the Birmingham Liberal Association “now nominates almost all members of the town council, the board of guardians, and the school board.”⁶⁵⁶ This impression vanished in the coming decades, but social scientist Mosei Ostrogorski still became famous by critically noting that the NLF dominated national politics entirely by its “machinery.”⁶⁵⁷ The historian and later NLF president Robert Watson provided a similar, though more favorable, version of the power of electoral organization that he described as the “force of Liberal unity as organized by such a machinery of associations.”⁶⁵⁸ Only with further temporal distance did historians start to critically engage with these early descriptions and begin to reject the image of the potent organization of the NLF.⁶⁵⁹ In the 1940s, Francis Herrick suspected that Ostrogorski had exaggerated NLF history, giving too much credit to the “inherent vitality of the ‘machine.’”⁶⁶⁰ More recently, Biagini concluded that Chamberlain had neither the financial means nor the organizational structure to develop an effective electoral campaign organization.⁶⁶¹ This criticism can be confirmed by the Liberals’ meagre electoral performance in the NLF home ground of Birmingham. Although the city was already a “stronghold of parliamentary Liberalism” before Chamberlain and his peers started to advance electoral

⁶⁵³ George Henry Croxden Powell, *National Liberal Organisation* (The National Press Agency, Limited, 1886), 4.

⁶⁵⁴ “The Caucus System,” *North Wales Chronicle*, August 17, 1878, British Library Newspapers. See also Diamond, *Victorian Sensation*.

⁶⁵⁵ Henry W. Crosskey, *The Liberal Association - the “600” - of Birmingham*. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 1.

⁶⁵⁶ “The Caucus in England,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 20, 1878, British Library Newspapers.

⁶⁵⁷ Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization*, 1:xvii.”

⁶⁵⁸ Watson, *The National Liberal Federation*, 37.

⁶⁵⁹ Dunbabin, “Electoral Reforms and Their Outcome,” 116; Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, 1978, 140–54; Rossi, *The Transformation of the British Liberal Party*, 119–20; Tholfsen, “The Origins of the Birmingham Caucus.”

⁶⁶⁰ Herrick, “The Origins,” 113.

⁶⁶¹ Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, 167–77.

organization, they had to accept numerous electoral defeats.⁶⁶² In the election for the city's first school board in 1870 the Liberals could not prevent Conservative control of the institution that their National Education League had vigorously promoted.⁶⁶³ Also in the council elections of 1872, Francis Schnadhorst, the future secretary of the Birmingham Liberal Association, did not succeed in convincing the voters of St. Mary ward of his candidacy.⁶⁶⁴ Even for Chamberlain, who quickly rose in the political institutions of Birmingham, this was a difficult year. The ambitious politician could sustain his council seat only after he had formed an alliance with the Labor activist W.J. Davies.⁶⁶⁵

This discrepancy between reputation and actual achievements of political organization does not mean that the belief in its power can be dismissed as an irrelevant historical curiosity. Rather this chapter focuses on the function of the rhetoric of organizational power on institutional consolidation in the first years after party foundation. For this purpose, I study the role of the elections, which has been often described as a decisive factor in the emergence of party organization. Political scientists have argued that party organizations were founded to address the growing number of ordinary voters who emerged after suffrage rights reform.⁶⁶⁶ In the historical context of the nineteenth century, however, the situation was more complicated, and elections were only one of many options to exert political influence. In comparison to other more established forms of political participation like petitions or protest, elections were not the easiest choice to exercise political influence. Moreover, in times of limited suffrage, the new party organizations remained in a disadvantaged position because most of their ordinary followers had still not been granted voting rights.⁶⁶⁷ If, as in Germany, universal male suffrage was introduced early, political outsiders faced oppression and imprisonment.⁶⁶⁸ In other words, for the first years after party formation, electoral activities cannot be treated as a given. One needs to rather ask why party founders increasingly engaged in electoral campaigns? The case

⁶⁶² Green, "Birmingham's Politics," 84.

⁶⁶³ Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 50. After School Boards were introduced through Foster's Education Bill in 1870, the National Education League started to agitate against them, because it feared Anglican control over local education funds. Balfour, *Britain and Joseph Chamberlain*, 81–89.

⁶⁶⁴ McGill, "Francis Schnadhorst," 19.

⁶⁶⁵ Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 61.

⁶⁶⁶ The political science literature is discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. An example of the political science focus on elections and party emergence is Boix and Stokes who argue that parties "developed into gradually more cohesive machines", after "the electorate expanded and elections became clean and truly competitive mechanisms of selection". "The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems."

⁶⁶⁷ This was also an argument that party founders used themselves. See de Jong, "Het antirevolutionaire volk."

⁶⁶⁸ Pracht, *Parlamentarismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*; Kupfer, "Die organisatorische Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratie"; Wolfgang Schröder, "Wahlkämpfe und Parteientwicklung: Zur Bedeutung der Reichstagswahlen für die Formierung der Sozialdemokratie zur politischen Massenpartei (Sachsen 1867-1881)," *Moving the Social* 20, no. 0 (1998): 1–66.

of the British NLF suggests that the image of electoral power was part of a wider strategy to be recognized as a relevant actor in national politics. At the same time, elections had an internal function as an argument to consolidate organizational structure. It was no coincidence that discussions about candidacies and electoral strategies quickly became crucial components of early party life. For party founders, they offered the opportunity to strengthen their leadership position within the new organizations, both in regard to parliamentary elites and ordinary followers.

2. The Myth of the Electoral Machine: the British NLF

2.1 *The Power of Disciplined Organization*

Joseph Chamberlain's national career started with the single-issue organization of the National Education League in 1869. While the local Birmingham Education Association had primarily gathered information about the state of municipal education, its national umbrella organization followed an explicit political agenda.⁶⁶⁹ At the beginning, the leaders of the National Education League tried to hide its electoral activities by avoiding direct references to elections. The founding meeting generally discussed how to create "an irresistible public opinion" and refrained from publicizing the electoral strategy that it intended to pursue with its financial means.⁶⁷⁰ When its *Monthly Paper* praised the "electoral work" of its agents, it had to remind members of the "confidential nature" of these campaigns.⁶⁷¹ This concealing strategy was quickly adjusted when the League assumed a more aggressive political strategy in response to Foster's Education Bill. For the by-elections in Bath in 1873, the organization tried to pressure the Liberal candidate Hayter to support their attack on the government's school legislation. When Hayter refused to cooperate, the League nominated J. C. Cox as an alternative candidate and instructed Secretary Francis Adams and Howard Evens to go to Bath for the purpose of coordinating the campaign in the local constituency.⁶⁷²

Upon arrival in Bath the small delegation was drawn into a violent conflict with the supporters of Hayter. A particularly agitated campaigner "threw a quantity of cayenne pepper into the eyes" of the two men, who "were temporarily blinded" and needed assistance on their

⁶⁶⁹ A. J. Marcham, "The Birmingham Education Society and the 1870 Education Act," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 8, no. 1 (1976): 11–16; Taylor, "Birmingham and the Movement for National Education."

⁶⁷⁰ National Education League, "Report of the First General Meeting of Members of the National Education League," 5, 10. Auspos, "Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics." Indeed, even the leaders of single-issue organizations had discussed whether their influence on parliamentary candidates was morally desirable and practically effective. Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure*, 32–37.

⁶⁷¹ "Monthly Statement," *Monthly Paper*, January 1873, 38 edition, 1, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁶⁷² Taylor, "Birmingham and the Movement for National Education," 214.

way back to the hotel.⁶⁷³ The conflict harmed both sides, who had to share the Liberal electorate between their two candidates. As a consequence, the victory went to the Conservative candidate Lord Grey de Wilton.⁶⁷⁴ In this situation, Chamberlain used the public attention to position himself as the leader of a powerful political movement. Instead of ignoring the public outcry or apologizing for the escalation of the electoral campaign, he warned that Britain would “see the lesson of the Bath election again and again repeated.”⁶⁷⁵ This aggressive statement was not a beginner’s mistake, caused by inexperience in organizing national political alliances, as some historians have argued.⁶⁷⁶ Throughout his career, Chamberlain used provocative rhetoric as an essential component of political strategy. In this way, the Bath incident became an early “*publicity success*.”⁶⁷⁷ Even if Chamberlain was driven by naivety, he had managed to make education the “prime topic of public discussion.”⁶⁷⁸ In the following years, electoral volatility further intensified the public discussion about electoral organization. After the defeat of the Liberal Party in the 1874 election, the British public came to believe that it was primarily single-issue organizations like the National Education League that played an important role in the “rapid disintegration” of the parliamentary Liberal Party.⁶⁷⁹ Chamberlain followed this logic and wrote that Liberal pressure groups had caused the electoral defeat because they had split the Liberal vote with their strategy of electoral pressure.⁶⁸⁰ As a result, he chose an even bolder approach to electoral organization that was embodied by the foundation of the National Liberal Federation in 1877.⁶⁸¹ Instead of diverting attention to the single-issue topic of education, the new party organization aimed at coordinating and directly shaping the electoral campaigns of local Liberal associations. Chamberlain directly connected these intensified organizational practices to the public concerns about new electoral practices. The NLF would become a powerful electoral force, because it represented the “great majority” of the “people.”⁶⁸²

These claims made the NLF an easy target for the criticism of Conservatives like Benjamin Disraeli. Already in its founding year, Disraeli put the organization in the context of

⁶⁷³ Howard Evans, *Radical Fights of Forty Years* (London: Daily News & Leader, 1913), 29.

⁶⁷⁴ Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure*, 131–34; Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, 381.

⁶⁷⁵ The quote is from a letter to the *Spectator* in 1873 in Auspos, “Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics,” 191.

⁶⁷⁶ See Taylor who wrote that Chamberlain was not a “man in blinkers, unable even to see any point of view but his own.” “Birmingham and the Movement for National Education,” 86. Also in connection to Chamberlain’s activities in the temperance movement, these arguments have been made. James B. Brown, “The Temperance Career of Joseph Chamberlain, 1870-1877: A Study in Political Frustration,” *Albion* 4, no. 1 (1972): 29–44.

⁶⁷⁷ Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, 381.

⁶⁷⁸ Taylor, “Birmingham and the Movement for National Education,” 93.

⁶⁷⁹ Jenkins, *The Liberal Ascendancy*, 138. See also Parry, *The Rise and Fall*.

⁶⁸⁰ Chamberlain, “The next Page.” See also Hamer, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure*, 9–37.

⁶⁸¹ Auspos, “Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics.”

⁶⁸² Chamberlain, “The Liberal Party,” 292.

the politically corrupt system of the US by comparing it to the American Caucus.⁶⁸³ The British press followed this lead and attacked the popular element of the NLF as a “transparent sham.”⁶⁸⁴ Commenting on the local branch of Bradford, the *Ipswich Journal* raised the question “why have so unmanageably large a Committee?”⁶⁸⁵ Instead of the 300 people in its leadership, a much smaller committee “of five or seven do it as well as several hundreds.”⁶⁸⁶ If, however, the purpose was the creation of a broad popular basis, then the question really was “why stop at a Committee of Three Hundred?”⁶⁸⁷ If popular participation was the main concern, “why not take in the whole party?”⁶⁸⁸ In this case, the party was the community of all Liberals in the country, regardless whether they were Radical or Whig. The NLF, however, assumed a false representative function: it “pretends to be founded upon popular election.”⁶⁸⁹

This sort of criticism dominated the debate about the NLF, but it lacked a solid empirical basis. While these commentators fiercely challenged the moral basis of the new organization, they immediately accepted that it possessed the ability to decisively influence elections. As he had done before, Chamberlain actively supported this myth. Responding to Disraeli, the NLF president “accepted the abuse of the Conservatives as a compliment,” as his biographer Marsh observed.⁶⁹⁰ Offering a reinterpretation of the label Caucus, Chamberlain argued that his critics had misunderstood the American model, “[i]n truth, (...) the caucus protects individuality and secures independence against tyranny.”⁶⁹¹ At the same time, he upheld the impression that he was the leader of a powerful electoral force that had “enabled the party to develop its full strength (...)” and “enlisted thousands and tens of thousands of our most active citizens.”⁶⁹² Right after the results of the 1880 elections were published, Chamberlain claimed that his organization had obtained sixty out of the sixty-seven boroughs of its campaign.⁶⁹³ From a strictly quantitative aspect, there were enough grounds to question this exaggerated interpretation. One critical observer wrote in the *Preston Chronicle* that “Mr. Chamberlain’s figures (...) do not prove much.”⁶⁹⁴ In total, the Liberal Party had won more than

⁶⁸³ Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 124. For the negative connotations of the US model to Caucus politics see Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, 103–19; Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, chap. 4.

⁶⁸⁴ “The Caucus in England.”

⁶⁸⁵ “The Caucus in England.”

⁶⁸⁶ “The Caucus - Shall We Have It?,” *Ipswich Journal*, January 14, 1879, British Library Newspapers.

⁶⁸⁷ “The Caucus - Shall We Have It?”

⁶⁸⁸ “The Caucus - Shall We Have It?”

⁶⁸⁹ “The Caucus in England.”

⁶⁹⁰ Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 124.

⁶⁹¹ Joseph Chamberlain, “A New Political Organization” (National Liberal Federation, 1878), 725, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

⁶⁹² Chamberlain, 730.

⁶⁹³ Mentioned in Rossi, *The Transformation of the British Liberal Party*, 119. Original article: Joseph Chamberlain, “The Caucus,” *The Times*, April 13, 1880, The Times Digital Archive.

⁶⁹⁴ “The ‘Caucus’ System,” *Preston Chronicle*, April 17, 1880, British Library Newspapers.

400 seats, making it “more than probable (...) that (...) Mr. Chamberlain’s sixty-seven boroughs were prone to the same influences which have secured their success all over the country.”⁶⁹⁵

These empirical observations remained a minority view. In general, the heated debate about the political model of the Caucus had made the organization an electoral power in the public eye. After the defeat of the parliamentary Liberal Party in the previous elections, contemporaries were looking for a reasonable explanation to account for its unexpected success.⁶⁹⁶ Although Chamberlain’s organization was less effective than most people believed, they saw the narrative of the electoral machine as the more reasonable explanation. In fact, the idea of the electoral power of the Caucus was so convincing that contemporaries wondered whether this organizational model could be applied to other political orientations.⁶⁹⁷ One commentator thought that the spread of party organizations was a positive development. He suggested setting up “some similar organization on the part of the Conservative party.”⁶⁹⁸ But the majority of critics feared that the electoral practices of the NLF provided ambitious politicians with the tools of voter manipulation. Like in an avalanche, those initially small changes of political structure could destroy the entire political system. This led to alarmed warnings that “if we admit the system of government by the caucus on the one side it will speedily climb to power on the other; so that we may see the political life of the country brigaded under the SCHNADHORSTS and HEAVENS.”⁶⁹⁹

Schnadhorst and Heavens were the secretaries of the Liberal and Conservative Associations of Birmingham.⁷⁰⁰ In particular, Schnadhorst, who was also secretary of the national organizational structure of the NLF, became the personification of this new type of electoral organization. In newspapers, his persona was directly related to the idea of an effective apparatus. Cartoons depicted him as the successful wirepuller behind the industrialized machine of the Caucus. This image summarized the public impression that the NLF enabled skilled administrators to manipulate the electorate like small mechanical components. While it was believed that these practices were extremely effective, their moral aspects and scandal-driven coverage attracted most attention. These continued controversies

⁶⁹⁵ “The ‘Caucus’ System.”

⁶⁹⁶ Parry, *The Rise and Fall*.

⁶⁹⁷ Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, chap. 5. See also the German Conservatives who copied the model of the revolutionary clubs in 1848 in Berlin. Waling, “1848 Clubkoorts en revolutie,” 253–55.

⁶⁹⁸ J.B. Fraser, “The Caucus,” *The Ipswich Journal*, December 14, 1878, British Library Newspapers. Probably Fraser became an influential Liberal in Ipswich, which makes his comments dubious. Joy Bounds, *A Song of Their Own: The Fight for Votes for Women in Ipswich* (The History Press, 2014), n.p.

⁶⁹⁹ “The Caucus in England.”

⁷⁰⁰ Historian Owen mentions a Charles Havens as leader of the Birmingham Conservatives Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, 112.

allowed Chamberlain to assume the position of a nationally recognized political figure that would soon be transformed into an actual government office.

2.2 *The Rebellious Side of Mass Mobilization*

The widely shared concerns about the electoral practices of the Caucus were related to the fears that the mobilized masses, once mobilized, could engage in violent unrest. On the other hand, the Caucus was often presented as a well-disciplined electoral machine. In general, Victorian political culture in Britain was characterized by an aggressive style, incorporating sharp political debates and regularly also physical force.⁷⁰¹ In the first half of the nineteenth century, disenfranchised citizens used violence to express their support or opposition for electoral candidates in the local context.⁷⁰² Also in Birmingham there was a longer tradition of political violence that preceded Caucus politics. Already in the 1830s demonstrations of Chartists could end in a “pitched battle” between 2,000 police men and angry protesters in the Bull Ring.⁷⁰³ In 1868, a man pretending to be a Liberal canvasser told Birmingham voters that their electoral strategy was adjusted, making the prior voting scheme obsolete. While this was a fraudulent intervention, it was the response of Liberal voters that was seen as the undisciplined side of popular politics. Once the fraud was discovered, no fewer than two hundred Liberals chased the deceiver who had to flee the neighborhood.⁷⁰⁴

After the foundation of the National Liberal Federation, it seemed for a short moment as if the well-organized machine could prevent such spontaneous outbursts.⁷⁰⁵ NLF leaders depended on a coordinated and disciplined membership to use the large number of their followers effectively, and respectable behavior was important for the political agenda of Radical Liberalism. Especially with regard to the political campaign on suffrage reform, the orderly behavior of NLF followers could serve as proof of ordinary people’s disposition for political participation. In 1881 a large number of NLF representatives attentively listened to Francis Schnadhorst when he discussed the advantages of the *Next Reform Bill* in Newcastle-on-Tyne.⁷⁰⁶ For a *Conference on Parliamentary Reform* in 1883 in Leeds, NLF delegates cooperated

⁷⁰¹ Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, 184; Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012). Vernon has argued that with the emergence of the party, the more spontaneous and uncontrolled outburst of popular emotion became increasingly restrained. Vernon, *Politics and the People*, chaps. 4–6.

⁷⁰² O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies.”

⁷⁰³ Stephens, “Political and Administrative History.”

⁷⁰⁴ Briggs, *Borough and City*, 168.

⁷⁰⁵ Vernon suggests that after parties brought an end to this sort of unregulated popular outburst, it was increasingly criticized and, more importantly, disciplined by party officials. Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 215–16.

⁷⁰⁶ Francis Schnadhorst, “The next Reform Bill: A Paper Read at a Conference of Liberals Held in Connection with the National Liberal Federation at Newcastle-on-Tyne, November 23rd, 1881” January 1, 1881, 12.

with the two organizations of the National Reform Union and London and Counties Liberal Union.⁷⁰⁷ The result was an enormous gathering with more than 2,220 delegates, coming from Accrington to Yorkshire, who engaged in a “long and spirited discussion on the question of the urgency of reform.”⁷⁰⁸ Only two weeks later, another conference was held in Glasgow where the MP Charles Dilke asked the peaceful meeting to support the motions of Leeds.⁷⁰⁹ The audience strongly appreciated these respectable efforts and came in their thousands to NLF conferences. A notable moment was the evening of the Ninth Annual Meeting in 1886, when the NLF hosted a public meeting that was open not only to the delegates, but also to local inhabitants with more than 10,000 people attending.⁷¹⁰

For the general public, these conferences did not appease their fears about violent outbursts of popular politics. The revolutions in France and America had demonstrated that democratic practices not only led to violence, but also inspired the corruption of the political process.⁷¹¹ In addition, the discussion about the Second Reform Act had strengthened concerns about the fitness of ordinary people to make political decisions. Growing reports about the social conditions in working class neighborhoods seemed to confirm the conviction that they were not ready for such important responsibilities.⁷¹² As a consequence, critics wondered whether parliamentarians of lower social standing would give way to the most vulgar aspect of politics.⁷¹³ Even adherents of electoral reform were not sure whether a more inclusive suffrage was desirable.⁷¹⁴ Working class activists, for instance, appeared to be skeptical about assigning the vote to every man, regardless of his employment.⁷¹⁵ Chamberlain actively supported these concerns by discussing political violence in connection with his followers. Although his

⁷⁰⁷ “Conference on Parliamentary Reform at Leeds.”

⁷⁰⁸ Watson, *The National Liberal Federation*, 37.

⁷⁰⁹ Watson, 38–39.

⁷¹⁰ Watson, 62.

⁷¹¹ For history of term and concept of democracy, see Saunders, “Democracy.”

⁷¹² Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth Century England*, vol. Taylor & Francis e-Library, Historical Connections (London: Routledge, 2002); Brian Howard Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians the Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872*, 2nd ed., ACLS Humanities E-Book (Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1994); Marcham, “The Birmingham Education Society.”

⁷¹³ Joanna Innes, Mark Philp, and Robert Saunders, “The Rise of Democratic Discourse in the Reform Era: Britain in the 1830s and 1840s,” in *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750-1850*, ed. Mark Philp and Joanna Innes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114–28.

⁷¹⁴ For the development of this idea in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, “Introduction,” in *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland 1750-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2013. A discussion of later developments in connection to the Caucus can be found in Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, 169–76. For working-class visions of how to involve the working classes in politics, see Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, 92–120. For the Second Reform Act Robert Saunders, “The Politics of Reform and the Making of the Second Reform Act, 1848-1867,” *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 3 (2007): 571–91.

⁷¹⁵ Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, chap. 6.

organization avoided direct calls for unrest, he presented it as a viable possibility in response to prolonged political discrimination. Already before the foundation of the organization, the NLF president experimented with this impression, when he wrote that “[a]narchy and revolution will be impossible when all just claims are satisfied by ordinary constitutional process.”⁷¹⁶ This quote was not an appeal for a peaceful political transition. Rather it functioned as a direct threat of civil unrest if working-class demands continued to be ignored. After the Liberal campaign for suffrage rights reform was impeded by the House of Lords, Chamberlain increased political pressure by referring to older practices of popular agitation. In August 1884, he reminded his supporters that “in 1832 a hundred thousand Midland men were sworn to march to London at need.”⁷¹⁷ This historical legacy still mattered for the inhabitants of Birmingham: “it would be a mistake to suppose that we are less earnest or less resolute than our forefathers.”⁷¹⁸ Chamberlain’s political adversaries could not ignore this threat of an angry Birmingham mob targeting the British capital. Conservative leader Lord Salisbury suggested that Chamberlain should be careful lest he return “from his adventures with a broken head if nothing worse”.⁷¹⁹ Chamberlain responded in a similar way and proposed that Salisbury should go for a picnic in Hyde Park where a large public demonstration in favor of suffrage extension had taken place earlier.⁷²⁰

These threats also had an impact on political practices. In October 1884, the Tories planned a rally with the prominent party members Sir Stafford Northcote and Lord Randolph Churchill. Taking place in Aston Manor, the “Aston Riots” were located in the North-East of Birmingham, giving the “working men of Birmingham” enough reason to attack the Tories.⁷²¹ At the day of the event, an angry mob “pulled off the coping of the wall” that surrounded the venue of the rally and stormed the event.⁷²² The violence and the involvement of prominent political figures brought this local incident national attention. The *Spectator* criticized this disorderly form of political expression, writing that

The real fear which checks the final triumph of Liberalism among the middle classes in this country is not a dread of what the masses will do with their votes, but of what they will do with their fists,—a dread, that is, lest under a Democratic Government law and order should not be adequately maintained.⁷²³

⁷¹⁶ Chamberlain, “The Liberal Party,” 295.

⁷¹⁷ Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 1932, 1:467.

⁷¹⁸ Garvin, 1:467.

⁷¹⁹ Garvin, 1:467.

⁷²⁰ Garvin, 1:467.

⁷²¹ “The Riot at Aston Hall, Birmingham,” 293 Hansard (HC) 1803-2005 § (1884), <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1884/oct/24/public-meetings-the-riot-at-aston-hall>.

⁷²² The Riot at Aston Hall, Birmingham.

⁷²³ “The Riots at Birmingham,” *The Spectator*, October 18, 1884, 5, The Spectator Archive.

This was the moment when Chamberlain's public "notoriety" reached its peak.⁷²⁴ The Tories accused the NLF president and Birmingham MP of having unleashed this working-class aggression. Yet, for Chamberlain, these accusations were not a reason to abandon his aggressive rhetoric. Like the accusations of electoral manipulation, these attacks were a means to gain further political attention. The controversial politician used the tumult in Aston to frame his politics as, what his early biographer Garvin euphemistically called, the struggle of the "People against the Peers."⁷²⁵ Once the Tories decided to put the riots on the parliamentary agenda, Chamberlain grabbed the opportunity. In a fierce debate, he vigorously defended the aggression of his local followers by blaming the violent outcome of the rally on its Conservative organizers. As he explained, the Tories had earlier obstructed the extension of suffrage rights, leaving the mob no option other than unrest to express their discontent. Attacking Randolph Churchill as the prominent participant of the rally, Chamberlain reminded the House that the Tory MP "at a meeting in Edinburgh, in 1883, declared that he would never give his assent to the franchise until the labourers showed their earnestness by pulling down railings and by engaging the police and the military."⁷²⁶ The accused Churchill did not have a good counterargument and responded a bit helplessly by asking the speaker "whether it is in order for a Minister of the Crown to put words into the mouth of a Member of Parliament, which that Member of Parliament never uttered?"⁷²⁷ Repeating the previous argument, Churchill did not respond to the accusation and demanded that Chamberlain had to admit his "direct complicity in these riots."⁷²⁸

The accused Chamberlain, however, had no incentive to bring an end to the discussions in parliament. Even the attempts of local foremen to ease the conflict remained without effect. The Birmingham leaders of the Conservative and Liberal organizations, Hopkins and Dixon, did their best to prevent further escalation of the conflict. They exchanged multiple letters to establish a truce, agreeing "to withdraw all reflections" about the involvement of each side.⁷²⁹ But for Chamberlain, the controversies around Aston had a decisive advantage, giving him reason to repeat his position in parliament. As a result, he was soon recognized as an influential member of the parliamentary Liberal Party. Indeed, in 1880 the NLF leader gained access to the highest political ranks of the nation when William Gladstone invited the inexperienced politician to join his cabinet as President of the Board of Trade. The early appointment of the Radical parliamentarian was inspired by Chamberlain's fame as the "coming man amongst the Radicals"

⁷²⁴ Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 78.

⁷²⁵ Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 1932, 1:quote from 466, see also 466-468.

⁷²⁶ The Riot at Aston Hall, Birmingham.

⁷²⁷ The Riot at Aston Hall, Birmingham, 24.

⁷²⁸ The Riot at Aston Hall, Birmingham.

⁷²⁹ "George Dixon to J. Satchell Hopkins," February 18, 1885, Manuscript papers relating to Francis Schnadhorst and the organisation of the Liberal Party, University of Bristol Special Collections.

who commanded a powerful electoral force.⁷³⁰ In this way, the NLF leader became an essential component of British politics, not because of electoral power, but because of the notorious reputation of his electoral practices. The scandals around the disciplined, yet potentially uncontrollable, ordinary followers of this new organization made him a national politician to reckon with, after less than four years of parliamentary experience.

3. Elections as a Mechanism for Internal Consolidation: the Dutch ARP

3.1 A Future in “Darkness”?

There are some remarkable similarities between Joseph Chamberlain and the Dutch party founder Abraham Kuyper. Both men were considered political outsiders in the early stages of their careers. Both tried to convince their parliamentary peers to implement a more radical political agenda. Like Chamberlain, Kuyper benefited from the already existing parliamentary network of his political orientation that provided the ordinary Protestant minister with a direct connection to national politics. Kuyper also resembled Chamberlain in quickly understanding that the established parliamentarians of his political orientation were not willing to follow his provocative demands. Like Chamberlain, Kuyper turned to popular organization to increase his political influence. Arguing that his followers were the ordinary men of the lower classes, Kuyper presented himself as the true representative of his ordinary followers’ political interest. He used emotional rhetoric to mobilize Orthodox Protestants, connecting his private life to his public persona.⁷³¹ Kuyper, like Chamberlain, experienced fierce opposition to his populist strategy. Many Dutch critics feared that the mobilization of ordinary people could lead to civil unrest, causing violent conflict. Liberal parliamentarians, in particular, disapproved of what they felt was an overly dramatic way of conducting politics.

Since the early nineteenth century, Dutch politics had been dominated by a sober debating style, embodied by prominent Liberals such as Prime Minister Thorbecke.⁷³² Following Thorbecke’s example, the honorary gentlemen of the Dutch parliament’s *Tweede Kamer*

⁷³⁰ “The Caucus - Shall We Have It?” Ostrogorski offers a similar conclusion when writing that the NLF leader presented his “rapid elevation” as “accounted for (...) by the services which Mr. Chamberlain had rendered to the Liberal Party by the introduction of the Caucus, and which Mr. Gladstone was anxious to acknowledge.” *Democracy and the Organization*, 1:205. See also Quinault who also argues that “Chamberlain’s role in late Victorian politics has generally been exaggerated.” T. R. Gourvish, Alan O’Day, and Robert Quinault, eds., “Joseph Chamberlain: A Reassessment,” in *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 70.

⁷³¹ Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap*, chap. 2.

⁷³² For instance, the Liberal leader Thorbecke was especially valued and influential because he abstained from using a sophisticated oratorical repertoire. Henk te Velde, “Staten-Generaal en Parlement. De Welsprekenheid van de Tweede Kamer,” in *In dit Huis: Twee Eeuwen Tweede Kamer*, ed. Remieg Aerts et al. (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015), 167–91. In comparison to Britain, Dutch debating clubs were a domain of the Liberal elite. van Rijn, *De eeuw van het debat*.

preferred political decisions to be based on rational arguments, rather than emotions.⁷³³ This also meant that ordinary people, who lacked the education and civilized behavior of middle-class voters, were considered unfit to judge political questions.⁷³⁴ When the Liberal newspaper *Het Nieuws van Den Dag* (The News of the Day) discussed the possible consequences of the ARP's electoral campaign, it referred to this breach with the conventional norms of political behavior. The newspaper argued that the ARP had failed to gather support in "the civilized part of the nation."⁷³⁵ Only naïve and uneducated citizens responded to Kuypers's rhetoric, who was "a born agitator" and campaigned in remote villages, gathering his followers in unsuitable and improper venues such as "churches, sheds, inns and wherever."⁷³⁶ These backward farmers and "orthodox ministers of the countryside" who "usually do not have a clue about anything," followed Kuypers "obediently, even blindly."⁷³⁷ Even worse, bringing these people into the political process, Kuypers risked a future "in darkness."⁷³⁸ Finally, the article painted a bloody doom scenario, arguing that "the bloody feuds of earlier times are near again."⁷³⁹ The newspaper's blunt reference to the Eighty Years' War was a reminder that religious emotion had already once caused a violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the Netherlands.

Kuypers responded to these allegations with an assertiveness that matched that of his British counterpart. Like Chamberlain, the Dutch party leader used the prejudice against his followers for his own political rhetoric. In the historiography, there are numerous examples of Kuypers's emotional rhetoric alienating the established political order.⁷⁴⁰ Already during his first parliamentary term in 1874, his overly dramatic speeches and Bible quotes had shocked his fellow parliamentarians.⁷⁴¹ Claiming that "the 'intelligentsia' is not with us, but the other side," Kuypers emphasized the popular element of his support basis.⁷⁴² The limited educational background of ARP followers, however, did not mean that they could not constitute an important political force: "unfortunately, among 'even more stupid farmers' are yet also many

⁷³³ Henk te Velde, *Van regentenmentaliteit tot populisme: politieke tradities in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010), 106–12, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20836>.

⁷³⁴ Haan, *Het beginsel van leven en wasdom*, 100–105.

⁷³⁵ "het beschaafde deel der natie" "In Duisternis.," *Het Nieuws van Den Dag: Kleine Courant*, June 15, 1879, 2, Delpher.

⁷³⁶ "een geboren agitator" "kerken, schuren, herghamen of waar ook" "In Duisternis.," 2.

⁷³⁷ "orthodoxe dominees ten platen lande" "in de regel van 'toeten noch blazen' weet" "gehoorzamen even blindelings" "In Duisternis.," 2.

⁷³⁸ "in duisternis" "In Duisternis.," 2.

⁷³⁹ "de bloedige veten van weleer zijn weder in aantocht" "In Duisternis.," 2.

⁷⁴⁰ Koch, *Abraham Kuypers*; Janssens, *opbouw*; van Helden, "De 'kleine luyden' van Abraham Kuypers"; Kuiper, "De weg van het volk"; Velde, "Ervaring en zingeving in de politiek"; Hoekstra, "De kracht van het gesproken woord."

⁷⁴¹ Daan Beers, "Abraham Kuypers en de zedelijke politiek, 1863-1877" (Leiden University, 2016).

⁷⁴² "de 'intelligentsie' is niet bij ons, maar aan de overkant" "De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV," *De Standaard*, January 9, 1879, Delpher.

voters.”⁷⁴³ Later Kuyper modified this argument by stating that ordinary ARP followers were discriminated against by the existing franchise.⁷⁴⁴

Despite these many similarities between the Dutch ARP and the British NLF, Kuyper did not follow his British counterpart in claiming early government office. Even more remarkable, the Dutch party leader downplayed the electoral potential of his organization. After the first parliamentary elections of the ARP, Kuyper argued in *De Standaard* that the organization should not be overestimated. In Britain, Chamberlain had presented the NLF as the decisive force of the 1880 electoral triumph. But Kuyper called for “complete soberness” in the evaluation of the electoral results of 1879.⁷⁴⁵ The otherwise so pretentious Protestant minister openly admitted that “in some districts even deterioration” could be observed.⁷⁴⁶ There was “progress” (...) but always modestly.⁷⁴⁷ In fact, the reports on “the achieved victory” of critics and adherents alike were an “exaggeration.”⁷⁴⁸ This restrained political strategy was also reflected in the public discourse, in which the powerful metaphor of the “‘machine’ in politics” for political organizations was remarkably absent.⁷⁴⁹ It is true that Kuyper used military terminology to evoke the image of a well-functioning command structure to describe his organization.⁷⁵⁰ In the rhetorical world of the Protestant minister, Anti-Revolutionary followers were “troops,” middlemen transformed into “officers” and more senior party representatives were even promoted to “old generals.”⁷⁵¹ But to many Dutch contemporaries the electoral machine remained a foreign institution, connected to the American party system.⁷⁵² When in the 1880s, the machine metaphor finally appeared in the Netherlands, it did not refer to Kuyper but to the Social Democratic leader Domela Nieuwenhuis. The *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* (Rotterdam Newspaper) that criticized Nieuwenhuis for acting like a mechanical apparatus, repeating the same speech over and over again: “He is a machine, and nothing more.”⁷⁵³

In comparison to Chamberlain, Kuyper was also remarkably constrained when it came to talking about physical conflicts with other political orientations. This was caused not only by the pragmatic political culture of the Netherlands and the ARP’s conservative political

⁷⁴³ “ongelukkigwijjs, zijn er onder die ‘nog dommer boeren’ toch ook heel wat kiezers” *De Juni-stembus*, *De Standaard*, April 14, 1879, 1, Delpher.

⁷⁴⁴ De Jong, “Het antirevolutionaire volk.”

⁷⁴⁵ “volslagen nuchterheid” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

⁷⁴⁶ “in sommige districten zelfs achteruitgang” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

⁷⁴⁷ “vooruitgang” (...), maar altijd matig” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 II,” *De Standaard*, August 18, 1879, 1, Delpher.

⁷⁴⁸ “de behaalde overwinning” “overdrijving” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

⁷⁴⁹ “‘machine’ in de politiek” “De ‘Machine’ in de Politiek,” *De Grondwet*, January 30, 1883, 1, Delpher.

⁷⁵⁰ Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap*, 61.

⁷⁵¹ “troepen” “officieren” “oude generals” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

⁷⁵² “De ‘Machine’ in de Politiek.”

⁷⁵³ “Hij is een machine, en niets meer.” “Binnenland,” *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, November 15, 1884, 1, Delpher.

orientation.⁷⁵⁴ In fact, Orthodox Protestants had occasionally used violent force to reach their goals.⁷⁵⁵ One of the rare reported engagements of physical encounters that involved Anti-Revolutionaries occurred in the process of the *Doleantie* when Kuyper split from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1886. The situation escalated when Kuyper and his followers sawed an opening into the door of the council chamber in the New Church in Amsterdam. After this incident, students of the Anti-Revolutionary Free University guarded the door “armed with bats,” defending the church for an entire year after the incident.⁷⁵⁶ The nineteenth-century Dutch Liberal press responded in high alarm, interpreting the event as a “*coup d’état*,” criticizing the “attack” on social peace “through the party of Kuyper” and its “violent occupation of the New Church.”⁷⁵⁷ Later historiography, however, describes the event as “a lengthy exchange of views that avoided the use of force” and occurred in the orderly way typical for the “Dutch manner.”⁷⁵⁸

There were two reasons for Kuyper to be more careful about invoking heated public controversies over the political power of mass organization. For one, the electoral system of the Netherlands was more restrictive than Britain’s, making it more difficult for newcomers to gain electoral support. While 30% of the British male population had the vote, in the Netherlands it was about 11%.⁷⁵⁹ In addition, Kuyper did not possess Chamberlain’s strategic advantage of being connected to a parliamentary party with government experience. Until the 1880s, Anti-Revolutionary parliamentarians had been a small minority, without a realistic chance of gaining cabinet offices in the Liberal-dominated government.⁷⁶⁰ It took another decade, and the support of the despised political Catholicism, to establish a cabinet under the leadership of the Anti-Revolutionary MacKay to govern the Netherlands.⁷⁶¹ Parliamentary opposition was, however, not only a consequence of the political circumstances of the ARP. The main reason for following an “anti-ministerial” approach had to do with the party leader’s specific approach to the role of party organization.⁷⁶² Kuyper himself explained in *De Standaard*

⁷⁵⁴ For a critical discussion of violence and Dutch political culture, see Connie Kristel and J. C. H. Blom, *Met alle geweld: botsingen en tegenstellingen in burgerlijk Nederland* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2003).

⁷⁵⁵ The April Movement had shown that Dutch Protestants not only relied on orderly behavior, but could also use more contentious forms of protest. Houkes, *Christelijke Vaderlanders*, 32–34. See also the 1872 riots between Protestants and Catholics – F. Groot, “De strijd rond Alva’s bril. Papen en geuzen bij de herdenking van de inname van Den Briel, 1572-1872,” *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 110, no. 2 (January 1, 1995).

⁷⁵⁶ “gewapend met knuppels” Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 265.

⁷⁵⁷ “aanslag” “door de partij van Kuyper” “gewelddadig bezit genomen van de Nieuwe Kerk” “De geheime Vergadering van Dr. Kuyper,” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, January 27, 1886, 1, Delpher.

⁷⁵⁸ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 149.

⁷⁵⁹ De Jong, Kolk, and Voerman, *Verkiezingen op de kaart*, 18. Rokkan and Meyriat, *International Guide to Electoral Statistics*, 1:330, 333.

⁷⁶⁰ Deursen, “Van antirevolutionaire richting.”

⁷⁶¹ Brinkel and Bruijn, *Het kabinet-Mackay*.

⁷⁶² “anti-ministerieel” “Centraal-Comité,” *De Standaard*, August 20, 1879, 1, Delpher.

that the ARP had to ignore “the governmental territory” in order to focus on influencing the “popular spirit.”⁷⁶³ Kuyper justified his preference for opposition by citing the general state of the Anti-Revolutionary community. There was a “temporary separation” between the party in “the land” and in “the house.”⁷⁶⁴ For Kuyper, the Anti-Revolutionary aristocrats in parliament had failed to connect to their ordinary supporters. They had disregarded “every attempt and intend to act as a ‘connected complete’ organ in parliament of what stood behind them in the land.”⁷⁶⁵

To overcome this internal division, Kuyper suggested three points. First, parliamentarians needed to be more modest and work together as one party, leaving their “proud” position behind.⁷⁶⁶ Second, this united parliamentary group had to reconnect to ordinary supporters in “the land.”⁷⁶⁷ This included accepting Kuyper’s political program, attending the deputy assembly and cooperating with the press organs of the ARP. Finally, the parliamentary party needed to follow an independent political course, different from those of other parliamentary groups to provide the ARP with a distinct ideological orientation and policy. Published in *De Standaard*, the tone of these three points sounded more like a military command than a suggestion. Even Kuyper recognized that his proposal could offend his political allies. Downplaying the magnitude of his demands, he wrote “that nobody will find us high-minded if we limit the minimum of our expectations to these three points.”⁷⁶⁸ Eventually, however, for Kuyper, the situation was clear: Anti-Revolutionary parliamentarians had to better connect with the popular base of their politics. Only when the ARP developed a more coherent political strategy could it become a powerful political force.

3.2 *The Party in Parliament vs. the Party in the Land*

After the foundation of the ARP, Kuyper not only became the mastermind behind the ideological agenda, but also increasingly coordinated the internal structure of the party. In this position, he became the connecting element between aristocratic parliamentarians and their voters. To improve the electoral position of the ARP, Kuyper established a coherent political strategy. This meant that the independent behavior of Anti-Revolutionaries needed to be

⁷⁶³ “volksgeest” “het regeringsterrein” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 I,” *De Standaard*, August 13, 1879, 1, Delpher.

⁷⁶⁴ “tijdelijke seperatie” “het land” “de Kamer” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 III,” *De Standaard*, August 25, 1879, 1, Delpher.

⁷⁶⁵ “van elk pogen of bedoelen om als ‘aaneengesloten geheel’ orgaan in het parlement te zijn van wat achter hen stond in het land” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 III,” 1. The distinction between the party in parliament and the party in land originates from the French expression of *pays reel* and *pays legal*

⁷⁶⁶ “hoogmogenden” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

⁷⁶⁷ “den lande” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

⁷⁶⁸ “dat wel niemand ons hoogeischend zal vinden, indien we het minimum van onze verwachtingen beperken tot deze 3 punten.” “De antirevolutionaire partij ná Juni 1879 IV,” 1.

coordinated according to the interest of ordinary voters. The consequence was the strengthening of his position as the representative of ordinary people. For the aristocratic parliamentarians, this meant a restriction on their political independence. From the beginning, the political course of the party was shaped by the party organization in which parliamentarians had limited influence. Already for adjustments of the party program, a two-thirds majority of the Deputy Assembly was needed. Parliamentary representatives were a minority at these bi-annual gatherings and had no possibility to influence the political agenda that they were supposed to represent in the *Tweede Kamer*. When at the end of the decade, the ARP moved its offices to the building of *De Standaard* in Amsterdam, Kuyper's grip on the party was further extended.⁷⁶⁹

In this centralization process, elections provided Kuyper with a pretense to intervene in local electoral associations and influence the selection of Anti-Revolutionary candidates. According to the statutes of the ARP, local branches were independent and could "never be expected (...) to give up a single piece of part or their autonomy."⁷⁷⁰ In other words, only local members were supposed to determine the nature of the electoral campaign, including their parliamentary candidates. This also meant that the central committee could not nominate candidates for a constituency where a local branch had already chosen its own candidate. In public, Kuyper accepted this rule, but in the organizational practice of the ARP it became clear that candidates needed the approval of the central party headquarters to run under the party's banner. In addition to the article about independence, the regulations asked for the following: "[e]lectoral associations who send deputies to the central committee are expected to subscribe to the program."⁷⁷¹ As president of the central committee, Kuyper made it his responsibility to inquire regularly with local middlemen about a candidate's fitness to win elections. He also used his office to control their commitment to the party's more-than-500-page manifesto.⁷⁷² Before the 1881 election, an article in *De Standaard* explained what this meant for local associations. Potential Anti-Revolutionary parliamentarians had to affirmatively respond to four questions:

1. Does he want to be candidate?
2. Is he Anti-Revolutionary?
3. Does he accept the program?

⁷⁶⁹ Janssens, *opbouw*, 272–76.

⁷⁷⁰ "nooit geacht (...) eenig stuk of deel van hare autonomie te hebben prijs gegeven" "Statuten," 5.

⁷⁷¹ "Kiesvereeningen, die Deputaten naar de vergadering van het Centraal Comité zenden, worden geacht zich bij dit program aan te sluiten." "Statuten," 5.

⁷⁷² Kuyper, *Ons program*.

And 4. Will he, if elected, join our parliamentary club?⁷⁷³

If candidates wanted to gain the support of the newspaper and the financial support of the central committee, they had to publicly declare themselves Anti-Revolutionaries according to Kuyper's interpretation of the term. As the historian Janssens has shown, these questions could be interpreted in different ways, depending on the candidate's relationship with the specific local associations.⁷⁷⁴ When in the city of Groningen the lawyer Van Swinderen refused to publicly commit to the ARP program, Kuyper did not intervene, and the candidate was excluded from the Anti-Revolutionary campaign, according to party regulations.⁷⁷⁵ For candidates who were closer to Kuyper's sphere of influence, exceptions were granted as in the small town of Goes. Pompe van Meerdervoort had earlier hesitated to place his candidacy under the roof of a common program that seemed to him like signing an "imperative mandate."⁷⁷⁶ Initially, this was unacceptable to the central committee that decided to abandon Pompe, like van Swinderen. But Kuyper, as chairman of the central committee, intervened. Without consulting with the local electoral association, he offered Pompe a compromise: instead of fully committing to the program, he could vaguely agree to the major points of the Anti-Revolutionaries.⁷⁷⁷

Considering Kuyper's charismatic representative organizational model discussed in the previous chapter, his behavior might seem like an exception among early party founders. But also in the case of the British National Liberal Federation, the organization's leadership used elections to establish a more coherent political strategy among its local associations.⁷⁷⁸ Together with the help of Secretary Francis Schnadhorst, Chamberlain regularly disregarded this commitment to popular control. The organization had no political program that committed candidates to a political course, but new candidates needed Chamberlain's recommendation if they wanted to run in a NLF constituency.⁷⁷⁹ Despite differences in political rhetoric, the party organizations of NLF and ARP underwent a similar internal centralization process. For party leaders like Chamberlain and Kuyper, elections provided a suitable opportunity to exercise

⁷⁷³ "1. Wilt gij candidaat zijn? 2. Zijt gij antirevolutionair? 3. Aanvaardt gij het Program? En 4. sluit ge u, gekozen zijnde, aan bij onze Kamerclub?" "Verloren Districten," 1.

⁷⁷⁴ Janssens, *opbouw*.

⁷⁷⁵ Janssens, 184–90.

⁷⁷⁶ "mandat impératif" Janssens, 197.

⁷⁷⁷ Janssens, 196–200.

⁷⁷⁸ The question of mandates' independence dominated many discussions in this period, inspiring political philosophers until today. Hanna Pitkin, "Representation," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. James Farr, Russell L. Hanson, and Terence Ball, Ideas in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 142–44.

⁷⁷⁹ Chamberlain e.g. intervened in the East Worcestershire election writing to Schnadhorst that he "entirely differ[ed]" with him about electoral strategy, and thus proposed that he "must be overruled." "Joseph Chamberlain to Schnadhorst," April 25, 1879, 1, Manuscript papers relating to Francis Schnadhorst and the organisation of the Liberal Party, Special Collections, University of Bristol.

control over the established elite of their political orientation. Faced with different starting positions in their respective political systems, the two men developed different ways to instrumentalize electoral campaigns for their struggle for internal cohesion. While the British Liberals could gain government office by transforming the party into an electoral machine, the Dutch Anti-Revolutionaries took a more modest position in public. In other words, for Chamberlain, the image of the electoral machine of the Caucus was useful as it provided him with direct access to national political institutions. In contrast, in the Netherlands with its tradition of less aggressive political rhetoric, Kuiper focused on strengthening his position within the party organization. In times of electoral campaigns, the Protestant minister exercised pressure on the aristocratic parliamentarians of his political orientation. As we have seen, for Chamberlain, the image of the efficient electoral machine became a pretense to exercise control over the local branches of his organization.

4. Parliament as a Stage: the German SDAP

4.1 A Revolutionary Party's Perspective on Elections

Did this process of internal consolidation also influence the Social Democratic Workers' Party in the oppressive circumstances of the German Empire? For many Germans, the introduction of universal male suffrage in the North German Confederation had initiated an era of popular participation.⁷⁸⁰ But Social Democrats could not immediately make use of this opportunity and remained a marginalized minority in parliament. For the party, electoral campaign was not a question of whether to accept government office, but rather about the general desirability of political participation.⁷⁸¹ Wilhelm Liebknecht summarized this feeling and argued that parliament was not the place where "history" was "made," but the stage for "comedy."⁷⁸² Instead of serving the people, parliamentarians were actors who followed the script of the Bismarck administration. They "say and do what the prompter whispers, sometimes loudly tells, them."⁷⁸³ Once elected, SDAP representatives were confronted with a hostile assembly, which made it difficult to achieve any political results.⁷⁸⁴ Parliamentarians of other political orientations not only verbally interrupted Social Democratic speeches, but even started a brawl when Bebel and Liebknecht entered the parliamentary stage.⁷⁸⁵ Also outside of parliament,

⁷⁸⁰ Anderson, *Practicing Democracy*.

⁷⁸¹ This attitude became more moderate over time, but the dilemma between keeping up the membership organization and parliamentary representation dominated the party throughout its history. Mittmann, *Fraktion und Partei*, 67–74; Pracht, *Parlamentarismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, chap. 3.

⁷⁸² "Geschichte" "gemacht" "Komödie" "Protokoll über den ersten Congreß," 13.

⁷⁸³ "sagen und thun, was der Souffleur ihnen zuflüstert, mitunter auch laut zuruft" "Protokoll über den ersten Congreß," 13.

⁷⁸⁴ Pracht, *Parlamentarismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*; Pollmann, "Arbeiterwahlen"; Groh, *Vaterlandslose Gesellen*, 20–25.

⁷⁸⁵ Pracht, *Parlamentarismus und deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, 43–55.

party members operated in an environment where there was no sympathy for oppositional forces. The German authorities actively obstructed the daily business of the party, preventing the foundation of new chapters, party meetings and electoral campaigning.⁷⁸⁶ Party members were seen as unpatriotic and treated “as radical revolutionaries who would take to the barricades.”⁷⁸⁷ Persecution also had a devastating effect on the personal lives of party leaders. Chamberlain and Kuyper may have risked their personal reputation, but Bebel and Liebknecht were imprisoned and banned for political agitation.

In light of their numerous experiences of oppression, it is no surprise that German Social Democrats were skeptical about, if not directly opposed to, participation in elections.⁷⁸⁸ Especially, Liebknecht, who had witnessed the failure of the Frankfurt Parliament in 1849, openly advocated a radical approach to social injustice. He demanded that the SDAP “appropriate the state and found a new one that does not know class domination.”⁷⁸⁹ This militant statement went beyond government reform, arguing for the complete reorganization of state institutions. As Liebknecht said, “[n]ot only the content, but also the form of the state is of essential importance.”⁷⁹⁰ Even the more moderate Bebel occasionally engaged in revolutionary appraisal. In the 1867 *Reichstag*, he proudly declared that he stood for “the same principles” as the 1848 revolution.⁷⁹¹ When in 1871 the Paris Commune gained control over the city, German Social Democrats publicly applauded their French comrades.⁷⁹²

Despite this revolutionary ideology, SDAP members became quickly involved in the electoral process, devoting their resources to campaigning. This was a contested strategy, provoking many internal discussions. Wilhelm Liebknecht proposed radical abstention from

⁷⁸⁶ Pollmann, “Arbeiterwahlen.”

⁷⁸⁷ Vernon L. Lidtke, “German Socialism and Social Democracy 1860–1900,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 791. Also see Groh, *Vaterlandslose Gesellen*, 20–25.

⁷⁸⁸ Socialist historians were fascinated by the relationship of early Social Democrats with parliament. Eisner, *Wilhelm Liebknecht*, 36–38. Likewise GDR historians have commented on this question, admitting that the relationship of the party with parliament was “ein kompliziertes Problem” Gustav Seeber, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und die Entwicklung ihrer revolutionären Parlamentstaktik von 1867 bis 1893. Einführung in die originalgetreue Reproduktion des Buches “Die Sozialdemokratie im Deutschen Reichstag”* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 11.

⁷⁸⁹ “des Staats bemächtigen und einen neuen begründen, der die Klassenherrschaft nicht kennt” “Protokoll über den ersten Congreß,” 11.

⁷⁹⁰ “[n]icht blos der Inhalt, sondern auch die Form des Staats ist für uns von wesentlicher Bedeutung” “Protokoll über den ersten Congreß,” 11.

⁷⁹¹ “für die selben Principien” *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstages des Norddeutschen Bundes. 1. Legislaturperiode - Session 1867*, vol. 1, 1867, 457, http://www.reichstagsprotokolle.de/Blatt3_nb_bsb00000438_00483.html.

⁷⁹² In particular the Braunschweig Manifesto of the SDAP board around Wilhelm Bracke gained public attention. The authorities arrested Bracke and other leading party members transporting them in chains to the eastern provinces of the German Empire. Bracke, *Der Braunschweiger Ausschuß*. For an analysis of the meaning of the Paris Commune see Bos, *Bloed en barricaden*.

Reichstag politics by returning his *Reichstag* mandate after his election.⁷⁹³ But Bebel convinced his friend of the advantage of parliamentary representation. As he reported in his autobiography, the “purely negating position” of Liebknecht “had never become decisive for the party.”⁷⁹⁴ In fact, even before the foundation of the SDAP, the two activists had actively campaigned for a mandate. When in 1867 universal male suffrage was introduced for the constitutional assembly of the North German Confederation, Bebel, Liebknecht and Robert Schrapf ran under the banner of the Saxon People’s Party (Sächsische Volkspartei).⁷⁹⁵ On this first attempt, only August Bebel and Schrapf managed to gain seats. But in August of the same year, the Saxon People’s Party had already extended its representatives with Liebknecht who eventually also accepted his mandate. During the 1871 elections, voters punished the radical position of Social Democrats towards the Franco-German War. Only August Bebel, by then member of the SDAP, was re-elected, leaving Wilhelm Liebknecht without his former parliamentary seat.⁷⁹⁶ But in the next elections in 1874, the tide turned with parliamentary representation increasing to seven mandates. In addition to Bebel, also Liebknecht, August Geib, Johann Most, Julius Motteler, Julius Vahlteich and Johann Jacoby were elected. One of the reasons for this small triumph was intensified electoral activity. While 80 Social Democratic candidates had run in the election of 1871, their number more than doubled to 184 in 1874.⁷⁹⁷

4.2 Liebknecht’s Usefulness Principle

The reason for this increased electoral activity was a remarkable orientation of the SDAP towards parliamentary politics. In contrast to ARP and NLF, Liebknecht and Bebel combined their parliamentary duties with a strong engagement in their party organization. When August Bebel was elected to the constitutional assembly of the North German Confederation, he reported to have felt “the need to give a bigger speech.”⁷⁹⁸ In fact, his local supporters were “most eager” for this moment and had inquired when their representative would finally appear

⁷⁹³ Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Ueber die politische Stellung der Sozialdemokratie insbesondere im Bezug auf den Reichstag* (Berlin: Verlag der Expedition des “Vorwärts” Berliner Volksblatt, 1869), 12.

⁷⁹⁴ “rein negierende Stellung” “für die Partei nie maßgebend geworden” Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben*, 298.

⁷⁹⁵ Pollmann, “Arbeiterwahlen.”

⁷⁹⁶ Also Reinhold Schrapf was elected in 1871, but although he was a member of the Saxon People’s Party, Schrapf did not join the SDAP. “Reinhold Schrapf,” *Biographien Sozialdemokratischer Parlamentarier in den deutschen Reichs- und Landtagen 1867 - 1933*, accessed October 21, 2011, http://biosop.zhsf.uni-koeln.de/biosop_db/biosop_db.php.

⁷⁹⁷ These figures probably include those candidates who were generally considered Social Democratic, but not members of the SDAP, for instance ADAV representatives. The parliamentary guide does not differentiate between SDAP and ADAV. Ritter, *Wahlgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, 121. The most extensive electoral campaign happened in Saxony where the party founded local electoral committees in every constituency, distributed electoral pamphlets and organized electoral assemblies with party speakers. Sperber, *The Kaiser’s Voters*, 64–67.

⁷⁹⁸ “das Bedürfnis, eine größere Rede zu halten” Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben*, 282.

on the parliamentary stage.⁷⁹⁹ In response to this local interest, the SDAP parliamentarian started to organize voter assemblies to report about his parliamentary experiences.⁸⁰⁰ For Bebel, parliament was a means to an end because it demonstrated the success and the political power of party organization.⁸⁰¹ Instead of aiming for legislative reform, he primarily focused on strengthening the coherence of the political community of early Social Democracy, because members could take pride in the performance of their representatives. Coordinated campaign efforts had brought the ordinary carpenter Bebel into the high halls of political power. On the steps to the *Reichstag*, he could literally run into figures of national political reputation like Prince Frederik Charles (Friedrich Karl) of Prussia, the “highest of the social step ladder.”⁸⁰²

Seeing parliament as an opportunity to gain publicity for the Social Democratic agenda soon convinced party members who initially were less enthusiastic about parliamentary representation. Even the old-revolutionary Liebknecht acknowledged that parliament provided a unique opportunity to the newly founded SDAP. As Liebknecht said, not moral arguments, but “practical, (...) tactical considerations” had convinced him to adjust his hostile position and called his new political position the “usefulness principle.”⁸⁰³ For Liebknecht, parliamentary office became a means to gain public attention and attract supporters: “[e]lections create at least a certain excitement that we have to use for agitational purposes.”⁸⁰⁴ This conviction was also incorporated in the party’s conceptualization of political change. After the formal constitution of the German Empire in 1871, its representatives gave up the hope of overcoming the existing circumstances any time soon.⁸⁰⁵ In Liebknecht’s words, the term revolution had two essentially different meanings that had to be carefully distinguished.

For one this might be understood as the simple fall of government, which might be the result of a short street battle. This is the narrow meaning of the word. The broader contains the entire development process of an entire social organism that has to create the respective form of state for itself. And this revolutionary process, which also does not rest during peaceful periods, can surely be advanced, but cannot arbitrarily be reduced to a discretionary time minimum by a miraculous recipe.⁸⁰⁶

⁷⁹⁹ “sehnlichst” Bebel, 282.

⁸⁰⁰ Bebel, 287.

⁸⁰¹ In the words of the historian Schröder, parliamentary representation allowed the small party “zur Repräsentanz der gesamten Arbeiterbewegung oder gar der Arbeiterklasse aufzusteigen.” Schröder, “Wahlkämpfe und Parteientwicklung,” 1–2.

⁸⁰² “der sozialen Stufenleiter Höchste” Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben*, 278.

⁸⁰³ “praktischen, (...) taktischen Rücksichten” “Protokoll über den ersten Congreß,” 13. “Nützlichkeitsstandpunkt” Liebknecht, *Ueber die politische Stellung*, 6.

⁸⁰⁴ “Die Wahlen erzeugen immerhin eine gewisse Aufregung, die wir zu agitatorischen Zwecken benutzen müssen.” “Protokoll über den ersten Congreß,” 13.

⁸⁰⁵ Schröder, “Wahlkämpfe und Parteientwicklung.”

⁸⁰⁶ “Einmal versteht man darunter den einfachen Sturz einer Regierung, der das Ergebnis einer kurzen Straßenschlacht sein kann. Das ist der engere Sinn des Wortes. Der weitere umfaßt den ganzen Entwicklungsprozeß eines neuen Gesellschaftsorganismus, der sich die entsprechende Staatsform zu

In the 1870s, the second peaceful meaning of revolution became increasingly important. Like the Anti-Corn Law League, German Social Democrats aimed for a reform of the political system. If SDAP members talked about revolution, they referred to the long-term transformation of society. This meant that the party could function simultaneously as “revolutionary party” and “a party of peace.”⁸⁰⁷ The task of Social Democracy was “to remove the barriers which stood against the natural development of society and state.”⁸⁰⁸ The state was a living organism that could function independently of the current formal institutions. As Liebknecht said, without the “mechanical apparatus, the machinery, the courtrooms and caserns” the “real state” would be able to endure.⁸⁰⁹ He believed that “[t]he state - that is just all of us; we millions of people that are united in a political community.”⁸¹⁰ For the SDAP, it was not the political institutions of the state, but the community of members that were the basis of politics.

The purpose of parliamentary representation was to facilitate the consolidation of the identity of the members as part of the Social Democratic community. This was also a prominent theme in the numerous publications of the SDAP. In order to increase working-class attention, *Der Volksstaat* frequently reported on parliamentary developments to its 6,000 subscribers.⁸¹¹ Calls to participate in the elections were accompanied by references to the moral superiority of Social Democratic candidates against the questionable motives of political adversaries. When Bebel’s candidature was promoted, the paper not only praised Bebel’s commitment to the German nation, but also denounced Liberal hypocrisy:

We want to be represented by a man who sincerely loves the German fatherland, and who is determined to supports its advancement on the path of order and freedom (“freedom that I mean” right, dear bourgeoisie? The freedom to exploit the workers!), by a man who cares strongly about the wellbeing of all and not the interests of a single class.⁸¹²

schaffen hat. Und dieser revolutionäre Prozeß, der auch in den friedlichen Perioden nicht ruht, kann wohl beschleunigt, nicht aber willkürlich durch irgend ein wunderthätiges Rezept, auf ein beliebiges Zeitminimum reduziert werden.” Liebknecht, *Ueber die politische Stellung*, 10.

⁸⁰⁷ “revolutionäre Partei” “eine Partei des Friedens” Liebknecht, *Leipziger Hochverrathsprozess*, 541, 550.

⁸⁰⁸ “die der naturgemäßen Entwicklung von Gesellschaft und Staat entgegenstehenden Schranken aus dem Weg zu räumen.” Liebknecht, 540.

⁸⁰⁹ “mechanischen Apparat, die Maschinerie, die Gerichtsstube und Kaserne” “wirkliche Staat” Liebknecht, 540.

⁸¹⁰ “[d]er Staat das sind eben *wir Alle*; wir Millionen Menschen, die zu einer politischen Gemeinschaft vereinigt sind” Liebknecht, 554.

⁸¹¹ Subscription figure is from Bloss, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Sozialdemokraten*.

⁸¹² Wir wollen durch einen Mann vertreten sein, der das deutsche Vaterland aufrichtig liebt, und dessen Fortschreiten auf den Bahnen der Ordnung und Freiheit (“Freiheit die ich meine“ nicht wahr, liebe Bourgeois? Die Freiheit, den Arbeitern die Haut über die Ohren zu ziehen!) zu unterstützen entschlossen ist, durch einen Mann, dem das Wohlergehen Aller und nicht das Interesse einer Klasse am Herzen liegt.” “Zur Wahl Bebel’s,” *Der Volksstaat*, August 1, 1873, 3. “Freedom that I mean” is the title of a popular song

After it became apparent that Bebel's parliamentary election had to be repeated because of a court decision, the voters of the district were reminded of their "threefold duty."⁸¹³ Not only did they have an obligation to their representative who had bravely endured imprisonment in his fight for working-class interests. They were also obliged to remain loyal themselves, using universal suffrage as a "weapon" to "opening the arena again."⁸¹⁴ Most importantly, however, was voters' duty to the "workers' party," which was in danger of losing its only parliamentary representative.⁸¹⁵ By all means possible, the party had to prevent being muzzled by its "enemies" of "the ruling classes."⁸¹⁶ Bebel further specified the role of elections in his brochure about *Die Sozialdemokratie im Deutschen Reichstag* (Social Democracy in the German Reichstag). The conclusions from his experience were presented soberly, and he openly admitted to readers that the popular parliamentarian did not expect to "rearrange the power structure."⁸¹⁷ Parliamentary representation had the purpose of appealing to "the working people (...) to raise its voice" for political change.⁸¹⁸ On the stage of the *Reichstag*, the small party had the opportunity "to talk to the millions who sadly do not see that they are in chains because of their unfortunate infatuation and naïve ignorance."⁸¹⁹ In response to this important mission, local party members were willing to support their parliamentary representatives with a financial allowance. Bebel, for instance, could not afford the train ticket from Leipzig to Berlin, regularly prohibiting his participation in parliamentary debates. But his local party branch, which "belonged to the poorest in Germany", decided to support the economically struggling craftsman.⁸²⁰ Similar initiatives helped Liebknecht whose campaign could count on financial support from party supporters abroad.⁸²¹ In 1874 the SDAP formalized the financial support for parliamentary representatives. The representatives of local branches voted in favor of a small financial compensation (Diät) for their parliamentarians to formalize the parliamentary representation of their young organization.⁸²²

(Freiheit die ich meine) whose lyrics were written by Max von Schenkendorf for the German Campaign against Napoleon. The text was first published in 1815. Michael Fischer, "Freiheit, die ich meine," *Populäre und traditionelle Lieder. Historisch-kritisches Liederlexikon*, 2008, http://www.liederlexikon.de/lieder/freiheit_die_ich_meine.

⁸¹³ "dreifache Pflicht" "Wähler des siebzehnten sächsischen Wahlkreises!," *Der Volksstaat*, November 1, 1873, 1.

⁸¹⁴ "Waffe" "die Arena wieder zu öffnen" "Der Volksstaat," 1.

⁸¹⁵ "Arbeiterpartei" "Der Volksstaat," 1.

⁸¹⁶ "Feinde" "der herrschenden Klassen" "Der Volksstaat," 1.

⁸¹⁷ "die Machtverhältnisse umzugestalten" August Bebel, *Die Sozialdemokratie im Deutschen Reichstag*, vol. I. (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1907), 66.

⁸¹⁸ "das arbeitende Volk (...) um seine Stimme zu erheben" Bebel, I.:66.

⁸¹⁹ "zu den Millionen zu reden, die leider noch in unseligen Verblendungen und naiver Unwissenheit die Fesseln nicht sehen" Bebel, I.:66.

⁸²⁰ "die mit zur ärmsten in Deutschland gehörte" Bebel, *Aus meinem Leben*, 293.

⁸²¹ "Zum Wahlfonds Liebknechts," *Der Volksstaat*, January 25, 1873, 4.

⁸²² See also Molt, *Der Reichstag*.

4.3 Internal Opposition to Reichstag Participation

Early electoral campaigns were the basis for the SDAP's long and successful history in- and outside of parliament.⁸²³ They also were an essential component of internal conflict. Finding a coherent political course and strategy was not easy for a comparably large number of active members. In 1873 the decision of the prominent Social Democrat Wilhelm Bracke to run in three electoral districts (Braunschweig-Blankenburg, Wolfenbüttel-Helmstedt, Sandersheim-Holzminen) caused an internal conflict. Familiar with the political conditions of his hometown, Bracke formed an alliance with the Liberal middle classes in the Democratic Electoral Association (Demokratische Wahlverein).⁸²⁴ As a local leaflet announced, the Braunschweig campaign targeted not only the working class, but also "citizens, farmers, civil servants and workers."⁸²⁵ The cooperation with the middle classes seemed promising when Bracke's candidacy was approved in "a large number of assemblies (...) with a storm of applause."⁸²⁶ For the leadership of the SDAP, however, the alliance with one of the political adversaries of their political orientation was problematic. The party newspaper *Der Volksstaat* criticized Bracke for what it thought was a naïve strategy. While the electoral alliance undermined Social Democratic ideology, there was little prospect of winning the Braunschweig seat. *Der Volksstaat* argued that the middle classes would never support a candidate who "was recognized as a Social Democrat, (...) 'infamous', so that not the most tamed program would be able to blur his standpoint. The hope to lure the less far-going peasants and petty bourgeois would therefore be a vain one."⁸²⁷

Although Bracke had a good relationship with Wilhelm Liebknecht, the Braunschweig candidate failed to convince his skeptical comrade of the wisdom of his electoral strategy. As the editor of *Der Volksstaat*, Liebknecht criticized what the Bracke called an "extravaganza" in private letters.⁸²⁸ A month later, Liebknecht made this concern about the "superfluous electoral association" public in *Der Volksstaat*.⁸²⁹ Even worse, Bracke's alliance was denounced as a "breach of program, which the party must not acquiesce."⁸³⁰ The accused Bracke did not accept these allegations and used his position as editor of the *Braunschweiger Volksfreund*

⁸²³ In 1912 the Social Democrats became the strongest faction in parliament.

⁸²⁴ Bracke was born into "gutbürgerliche Verhältnisses" in Braunschweig on the 29th Of May 1842. Seidel, *Wilhelm Bracke*, 9.

⁸²⁵ "Bürger, Landwirthe, Beamten und Arbeiter" "Reichstagswahlen Herzogthum Braunschweig" (Zentral-Wahlkomitee zu Braunschweig, 1873), 5, Nachlass Wilhelm Bracke, Stadtbibliothek Braunschweig.

⁸²⁶ "einer großen Anzahl von Versammlungen (...) mit stürmischen Beifall" "Reichstagswahlen," 4.

⁸²⁷ "als Sozialdemokrat so bekannt, (...) 'berüchtigt', daß kein noch so zahm gehaltenes Programm seinen Standpunkt zu verwischen im Stande wäre. Die Hoffnung, die minder weitgehenden Kleinbauern und Kleinbürgern damit zu ködern wäre, also eine eitle." "Correspondenzen," *Der Volksstaat*, February 15, 1873, 3. See also Eckert, *Aus den Anfängen der Braunschweiger Arbeiterbewegung*, 35.

⁸²⁸ "Extravaganz" 'Bracke to Liebknecht', 19 March 1873, in Eckert, *Aus den Anfängen der Braunschweiger Arbeiterbewegung*, 34.

⁸²⁹ "überflüssigen Wahlverein" "Politische Übersicht," *Der Volksstaat*, January 3, 1873, 2.

⁸³⁰ "Programmverletzung, welche die Partei sich nicht gefallen lassen darf" "Der Volksstaat," 3.

(Braunschweig People's Friend) to directly address his local followers.⁸³¹ In a local assembly, the Braunschweig branch confirmed their support. Even *Der Volksstaat* had to publish the local motion. Suspending its accusation, the newspaper accepted that the party congress was the "highest authority."⁸³² With the support of his local comrades, Bracke could maintain his electoral strategy. While in 1873 he did not win the *Reichstag* mandate, he gained a parliamentary mandate in 1877.⁸³³

In the case of Braunschweig, the party leadership tried to enforce political coherence by intervening in the electoral campaign of a local branch. A year later, another conflict emerged about electoral strategy with another electoral candidate. This time the board of the party did not oppose but rather demanded parliamentary representation for its local candidate. As an icon of the Democratic opposition of 1848, Johann Jacoby seemed like an ideal candidate for the young SDAP. The old-revolutionary had joined the party in 1872, soon serving as a candidate in the 1874 election in thirteen electoral districts. In addition to Breslau, Köln, Saxony-Weimar, Saxony and Württemberg, the prominent activist ran in two districts in Düsseldorf and all six in Berlin.⁸³⁴ For Jacoby's fourteenth district in Leipzig (Saxony 13), where the chances of a Social Democratic victory appeared most promising, the party leadership had planned a thorough campaign. Yet, Jacoby refused to address his voters in a local assembly, because his candidacy was not meant to convince voters, but was a symbol of his "protest against the Bismackery and against the entire current ruling system of government."⁸³⁵ Finally Jacoby warned Geib that: "in the case of election –the free decision about acceptance or decline of the mandate is mine."⁸³⁶

These abstract considerations became a concrete problem when the Social Democrats unexpectedly won the elections in Leipzig. The unforeseen victory was a triumph for party members which responded with great enthusiasm and pride. In particular, the local branch in Leipzig had worked hard for the campaign's success, wrote to Jacoby: "[w]ith the array of all

⁸³¹ The first issue of the *Braunschweiger Volksfreund* appeared on the 15th of May 1871 and soon became a daily newspaper. Bracke had supported the newspaper with his own financial means, founding his own printing house to publish the paper in September 1871. Seidel, *Wilhelm Bracke*, 50–54.

⁸³² "oberste Instanz" "Der Volksstaat," January 3, 1873, 3.

⁸³³ Georg Eckert, *Wilhelm Bracke: 1842 - 1880*, Niedersächsische Lebensbilder 4 (Hildesheim: August Lax, n.d.), 9.

⁸³⁴ "Johann Jacoby," *Biographien Sozialdemokratische Parlamentarier in den deutschen Reichs- und Landtagen 1876-1933 (BIOSOP)*, accessed September 20, 2016, http://zhsf.gesis.org/ParlamentarierPortal/biosop_db/biosop_db.php.

⁸³⁵ "Protest gegen die Bismackerei und gegen das ganze jetzt herrschende Regierungssystem" 'Jacoby to August Geib', 30 December 1873, in Edmund Silberner, ed., *Johann Jacoby Briefwechsel. 1850-1877*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Sozialgeschichte Braunschweig (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1978), 608.

⁸³⁶ "im Fall der Wahl – die freie Entscheidung über Annahme und Ablehnung des Mandats mir vorbehalten" 'Jacoby to August Geib', 30 December 1873, in Silberner, 608.

forces we have brought it so far that you prevailed in the Leipzig district.”⁸³⁷ In the same letter, the sensitive issue of accepting the parliamentary mandate was immediately mentioned: “in the name of many party comrades, namely on behalf of my friends Liebknecht and Bebel” Jacoby was asked “to not decline the mandate.”⁸³⁸ Also the national party leadership joined the circle of congratulating comrades and similarly petitioned Jacoby to reconsider his previous remarks. Secretary Geib reminded the candidate of the extraordinary opportunity that his electoral victory had unlocked. In parliament the popular Democrat could help increase the political legitimacy and national recognition of the SDAP: “With your voice our party’s cause in the Reichstag achieves a meaning like never before. It manifests that we are the true heirs of the old democracy, which we have been denied without you.”⁸³⁹

This argument focused on the broad symbolic power of parliament. For the party leadership this meant that the elderly Jacoby was not even expected to regularly attend parliamentary debates: “[f]rom our side, I do not really deem it necessary to attend all meetings uninterrupted.”⁸⁴⁰ For Jacoby, this sort of pragmatic compromise was only a reason to further strengthen his opposition. With the stubbornness of decades-long political activist, he repeated his moral argument: “I cannot act differently than according to my own convictions.”⁸⁴¹ It was true that his candidacy had served the purpose of “electoral agitation and the thereby to be achieved extension of the party,” but he was committed to avoiding the “actor-like appearance” in parliament.⁸⁴²

In contrast to the Braunschweig campaign of Bracke, the SDAP leadership was determined to get this rebellious candidate into parliament. When Jacoby tried to announce his decision to resign to his followers, *Der Volksstaat* postponed the publication of his letter. One day later, a group of Leipzig Social Democrats telegraphed to Jacoby to warn him about the consequences of his abstention. Their word choice reflected their grave concern – there was

⁸³⁷ “[m]it Aufgebot aller Kräfte haben wir es bis dahin gebracht, daß Sie im Leipziger Landkreis (...) gesiegt haben.” ‘Wilhelm Blos to Jacoby’, 31 January 1874, in Silberner, 614. For Blos see his autobiography Blos, *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Sozialdemokraten*.

⁸³⁸ “namens viele Parteigenossen, namentlich im Auftrage meiner Freunde Liebknecht und Bebel” “das Mandat *nicht* abzulehnen” ‘Wilhelm Blos to Jacoby’, 31 January 1874, in Silberner, *Johann Jacoby Briefwechsel*, 615.

⁸³⁹ “Mit Ihrer Stimme erlangt unsere Parteisache im Reichstag eine Bedeutung wie nie vorher. Es wird dadurch bekundet, daß wir die wirklichen Erben der alten Demokratie sind, was man uns ohne Sie stets streitig zu machen suchte.” ‘August Geib to Jacoby’, in 1 February 1874 in Silberner, *Johann Jacoby Briefwechsel*.

⁸⁴⁰ “Ich halte es überhaupt nicht für nötig, unsererseits ununterbrochen den Sitzungen beizuwohnen.” ‘August Geib to Jacoby’, 1 February 1874, in Silberner.

⁸⁴¹ “ich kann nicht anders handeln als nach eigener Überzeugung” ‘Jacoby to Wilhelm Blos’, 3 February 1874, in Silberner, 616.

⁸⁴² “Wahlagitation und der dadurch zu erzielenden Verbreitung der Partei” “schauspielartigen Auftretens” ‘Jacoby to Wilhelm Blos’, 3 February 1874, in Silberner, 616.

fear that the district could be lost “forever.”⁸⁴³ The prominent Saxon party member Julius Vahlteich wrote to Jacoby as well in “greatest horror.”⁸⁴⁴ Also this letter was an appeal to the candidate’s sense of duty as Vahlteich argued that Social Democrats were “newcomers on parliamentary territory” and “need (...) your support.”⁸⁴⁵ To the disappointment of the comrades, these letters failed to convince Jacoby. In February, the candidate finally returned his mandate to the Imperial authorities. In his published resignation letter, he repeated his previous arguments, reminding his voters of his morality that had guided his campaign from the beginning: “In advance convinced of the impossibility to reorganize the military state into a people’s state with the parliamentary method, I cannot change my mind to participate in negotiations whose failure stands for me without any doubt.”⁸⁴⁶

This explanation could not appease the voters in Leipzig. When the election was repeated, Jacoby financially supported Wilhelm Bracke, who was the new candidate. But the Social Democrat from Braunschweig had no chance outside of his hometown and lost the elections.⁸⁴⁷ This disappointing result permanently damaged the relationship between the electoral candidate and the party. After the elections, *Der Volksstaat* blamed Jacoby for the catastrophic defeat and wrote that, instead of honoring the will of his voters, Jacoby’s resignation was a selfish compliance to the existing order. Metaphorically this meant that the former candidate would “voluntarily surrender himself with tied hands to the enemy,” abandoning the party’s strategy to use parliamentary representation as the “most efficient means of popular enlightenment.”⁸⁴⁸ Even though Jacoby tried to justify his actions once more, the damage could not be repaired. In the SDAP’s popular agenda, *Volksstaatkalender* (People’s State Calendar), Jacoby’s name was erased from the canon of heroic personalities. In 1875, the editorial office replaced Jacoby’s entry with the Greek philosopher Heraclitus.⁸⁴⁹

5. The Internal Function of Elections

The first activity that comes to mind when thinking about parties today is elections. During elections parties compete for the necessary votes to obtain parliamentary majorities and government offices. For the first party founders, however, the choice was less obvious. In

⁸⁴³ “für immer” ‘Blos, Fink, Hadlich and Ramm to Jacoby’, 4 February 1874, in Silberner, 618.

⁸⁴⁴ “größten Schrecken” ‘Julius Vahlteich to Jacoby’, 4 February 1874, in Silberner, 618.

⁸⁴⁵ “Neulinge auf parlamentarischem Gebiet” “bedürfen (...) Ihrer Unterstützung” ‘Julius Vahlteich to Jacoby’, 4 February 1874, in Silberner, 618.

⁸⁴⁶ “voraus von der Unmöglichkeit überzeugt, auf parlamentarischem Wege einen Militärstaat in einen Volksstaat umzugestalten, kann ich mich nicht dazu entschließen, an Verhandlungen teilzunehmen, deren Erfolgslosigkeit für mich außer Zweifel steht.” ‘Jacoby an seine Wähler’, 3 February 1874, in Silberner, 617.

⁸⁴⁷ “Die Mandatsablehnung Johann Jacoby’s,” *Der Volksstaat*, February 20, 1874, 4.

⁸⁴⁸ “sich freiwillig mit gebundenen Händen dem Feind überliefern” “wirksamste Mittel der Volksaufklärung” “Der Volksstaat,” 1.

⁸⁴⁹ ‘Guido Weiß to Jacoby’, ca. 21 October 1874, in Silberner, *Johann Jacoby Briefwechsel*, 628.

nineteenth-century Europe, access to parliament was restricted by limited suffrage as in Britain or the Netherlands. Where suffrage rights were generously granted, parliamentary power was restricted by a powerful executive like under the German chancellor Bismarck. In addition, party founders faced hostility, sometimes even oppression. In this situation of limited political opportunity, elections were used for three different purposes. The first purpose seems to resemble the current function of election, but as a means to political power elections need to be interpreted in their historical context. While the electoral success of the British party founder Chamberlain was limited, he actively stimulated the impression of commanding an electoral machine to convince the public that the organization was a powerful political force. As a consequence, scandal-hungry contemporaries, repelled by Chamberlain's political style, paid much more attention to the NLF than its political strength deserved. What is remarkable, in this aspect, is that critics did not attack Chamberlain's exaggeration of electoral power, but rather targeted the democratic deficit of his organization, arguing that naive voters were manipulated into mindless political action. These accusations illustrated two contemporary concerns about popular politics. On the hand, the British public was alarmed about the disciplinary power of the machine or the Caucus. Chamberlain's critics feared, on the other, that the party founder might lose control of his agitated followers. For them, the masses also always incorporated the notion of the mob. As easily as ordinary people had decided to obey their populist leaders, they could also lose all discipline and violently destroy the country.

The second function of elections can be discerned from the experience of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands. Electioneering stimulated the internal coherence of early party organizations. In contrast to his British counterpart, the Dutch party leader Abraham Kuyper avoided any sort of exaggeration about the electoral potential of his party. For the Protestant minister, government office was neither realistic nor attractive. Rather he focused on the internal consolidation of his party organization. In this process, it was especially important to bring aristocratic parliamentary representatives in line with the political program of the ARP. Using electoral strategy as a pretense, Kuyper regularly intervened in the campaigns of local associations, exercising influence on the selection of candidates. Demanding that ARP candidates of the old political elite publicly embrace the party program, he extended his influence in the party organization.

From the experience of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party, another internal function of elections for early party organizations can be discerned. While the SDAP was committed to revolutionary ideology, its members became soon active participants in electoral campaigns. This break with previous ideas about parliamentary abstention was explained by citing the public function of the *Reichstag*. Well aware that they did not have enough support to change the political situation in the short term, Social Democrats like Bebel and Liebknecht expected to mobilize working-class support from the stage of parliament. This intention demanded a coherent political strategy that accepted neither close cooperation nor complete opposition to the existing political order. In other words, in regard to the control of the electoral

strategy of local branches, the Social Democratic leadership used the same arguments as its counterparts in Britain and the Netherlands. They celebrated every electoral victory as a triumph of the ordinary people. In a time when democracy was more utopian theory than practical experience, this was a viable strategy that helped maintain the organizational structure until political change was feasible.

