

**The Evolution of Parties.**  
A party, in the sense in which the term is now used, was unknown in the United States prior to 1833.

Previous to that time there was no such thing as party organization. The central power of the various political groups into which the people were divided, was exercised up to 1833 by what were known as Legislative and Congressional caucuses. These bodies were purely voluntary organizations, composed of individual members of Congress or the State Legislatures, who agreed with each other concerning certain fundamental ideas, which were deemed party issues. These caucuses formulated more or less complete platforms or resolutions and made nominations for State and National offices. These nominations were not regarded as binding on the voters of the party, but rather as recommendations, which were to be accepted or not, according to the pleasure of the voter, so that a party often had a number of candidates for the same office.

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Even this restriction of individual choice and opportunity became so irksome that the delegate convention, which is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the modern party, was adopted as an effectual cure for the evils of the caucus system.

For a time this result was no doubt secured. The delegate convention apparently gives to every member of a party an equal voice in the formulation of its principles and the nomination of its candidates. It constitutes a voluntary republic within the limits and conforming to the subdivisions of the political one it seeks to control.

It is an independent organization almost wholly beyond the verge of law in most cases, and even where professedly regulated by law really is so little affected by statutory enactments as scarcely to modify its essential defects.

In all attempts at self-government, whether in ancient or modern times, two forces have shown themselves above all others malign and dangerous, to wit:

1. The inclination of individuals to associate themselves together to control the political action of their fellows by force or intimidation.

2. The inclination of the self-seeking and ambitious to corrupt the general verdict, either by bribery of the elector or falsifying the record of collective action. This latter is accomplished either by fraudulent votes or by false returns of votes cast.

After sixty years of refinement and elaboration the machinery of the American party has reached that point where in all ordinary cases it is as apt to record a false verdict as a true one. This fact is recognized by a constantly increasing proportion of thoughtful and patriotic men.

"Self government," writes one of the most profound students of our American life, "is practically at an end in the United States. The mere shadow that is left is but a farce which the sooner it is played out the better. Today politics means mere control of party machinery for the promotion of individual advantage; and the control of party machinery is accomplished solely by the combination of adventurous aspirants for office and the unscrupulous use of money, first, in purchasing votes in the party caucuses; second, by corrupt agreements between rival aspirants, and third, by corruption of the voters themselves. These things are going from bad to worse in all parties and in all States, until it is well-nigh a mockery to declare, as you so often have, that the people are the real rulers. A party convention, when there is a prospect of the candidate's election, has more of the quality of an auction than an expression of the will of a majority."

There is no question about the truth of this description of existing conditions, nor can any words exaggerate the danger likely to result from the same. Self-government as a political system rests on the hypothesis that the fairly and truly expressed will of a majority of the people is a safer guide in the promotion of the public welfare than the wisdom of an aristocracy, however large or however carefully selected.

But when this will of the majority is vitiated by bribery, intimidation, or a false count, it ceases to have any merit whatever. It is then simply a forged decree expressing only the will and purpose of those bold enough, or unscrupulous enough, to seize power for their own advantage. Party organization has inaugurated and established the rule of the strong and the hopeless subordination of the weak, just as certainly as did feudalism and the mailed hand. The only difference is that now it is the power of bribery and fraud, as it was then the power of the sword and armed retainers.

Yet, this is still the fault of the people; they could not be robbed of power but with their own assent and usually with their own co-operation. There can be no fraud but by neglect; no intimidation but through lack of manhood to defend their rights, and no bribery if there were no corrupt electors.

Shift it about as we may, the responsibility comes back at last to the people themselves. They have permitted the opportunity to arise and the evil to develop, and on them rests the ultimate responsibility for its consequences.

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Just what is the effect of established and intricate organization upon the action of parties may perhaps best be inferred from the words of a somewhat noted political manager who once took the Bystander to task for his belief that the people ought to rule, are quite able to rule, and ultimately must rule, if republican institutions are to continue.

"You are all right," he said, "in the view that a majority of the people and of all parties are honest and patriotic. Yet there is a much larger purchasable element than is generally supposed. This element is not confined to the cities nor the disreputable. On the contrary, a large proportion of the cheapest and most easily purchased voters are in the country and are often among the most respectable people in their communities. I judge that in our ordinary farming region at least one out of every five voters, frequently more, is purchasable if rightly approached. As between parties of course the proportion is many people habitually sell their votes in caucus and what an influence that has on the politics of the country. These men really control the state, whenever our party is in a majority, that is, and the honest, patriotic three or four fifths of the party cannot help themselves."

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"Why not?" the Bystander asked.

"Why not? Because we 'have the bulge' on them, that is all. You see, everything depends on the caucus and the convention, and it is easy enough to control them if your organization is worth anything."

"How is that done?"

"Well, you see, after a few years a committeeman, if he is of any account, gets to know exactly who can and who cannot be approached and what is the best way to do it. This knowledge rightly applied means control of the convention. For instance, A. B. wanted to be a candidate for Governor. He came, and told me so. He is a good enough man, a reliable Republican, and pretty well fixed financially. I said to him, 'Nothing easier, if you are willing to pay so much money.' He is a religious man and has scruples against buying votes himself. I told him that was not necessary. If he would give me the money I would deliver the nomination. He hesitated; I think he was afraid I would sell him out, but I told him it was a matter of indifference to me; if I did not work for him I would for some one else. So it was finally arranged and I took hold of his campaign. He was to ask no questions about what I did with the money; so he saved his conscience. There were three in men the race, my man and two others. I was satisfied that one would drop out; the other was in to stay. Of course, each had a certain number of friends. I could run over the map and tell pretty surely what counties would send delegates for each. What did I do? I got one or two men in each of the counties which were sure to be against my man to come out loud-mouthed for the other fellow and get themselves named as delegates. It wasn't always an easy thing; but I managed to get enough, so that when the convention met I was sure of the nomination, unless some one bought up my reserves. This was not likely, as none of them knew who the others were. Of course they voted straight the first time; then they came over by ones and twos until it looked as if my man had won by sheer merit and general preference. Now, who nominated him? The straight voters gave him about one-third the votes of the convention. That was honest enough, but every vote beyond that was bought and paid for. How is that for self-government?"

The Bystander was no stranger to such facts. At one time and another he has gathered a great store of them. He was anxious, however, to get the opinion of an acknowledged veteran in such matters as to the curability of this disease. So he asked:

"Is this matter to continue always?"

"Well, yes," was the reply. "Of course there are checks and drawbacks. Every now and then the people get mad and kick at the 'ring' simply because somebody takes advantage of the opportunity to control the organization. That was the case when Cleveland was elected Governor. The Republicans had the State; their candidate was a good man, but the machinery by which he was nominated was badly worked. People don't like to be cheated in politics any more than elsewhere, but they will stand more of it there than anywhere else."

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"But cannot these things be prevented?"

"They could easily enough if any party wished them to be prevented. It is just as easy to restrict vote buying in the caucus or at election as it is to restrict murder or any other crime; but no party wants it done. Of course it cannot be done without legislation, and such legislation will never be secured so long as party organizations control legislative action."

"What means would you suggest to effect that purpose?"

"I would not suggest any. I am satisfied with things as they are. I suppose there will come a time, though, when people who, like you, really believe in self-government will band together and 'bust the whole lay-out.' I shouldn't be surprised to see an association formed, composed of voters of all parties, who should pledge themselves not to vote for any man whose nomination they believe to have been secured by purchase of votes or a deal with any other candidate. If even one-tenth of the members of a party should join such a league it would ruin politics as a business, for no man could risk the loss of that proportion of his supporters, and such things would be sure to leak out. The trouble in the way of organizing such a league is that so few people have backbone enough even to refuse to support a candidate whom they know to have obtained his nomination by corrupt means."

[This conversation took place several years ago. Because the Bystander is a Republican no doubt the veteran manager supposed he would overlook such irregularities for the sake of party success. No doubt the time was when he believed that such methods were chiefly confined to the Democratic party. But that was many years ago, when he was young and innocent. He used to think that intelligence, morality, and patriotism were of themselves sufficient to preserve a party from such influences. He has learned that all of these may be simply chains by which the citizen's hands are bound, so as to prevent the reform of such abuses.]

The matter has been forcibly called to mind at this time by the report made public during the past week that a certain prominent and wealthy citizen has stated that it would cost him \$250,000 to be chosen as Senator from his State. This was not, it is to be presumed, because of any unpopularity on his part, but because party organization has created a horde of jackals who demand money as the price of place and honor. This is the reason the Senate of the United States has become so largely a millionaires' club, and why in four cases out of five, where a nomination means an election, it is the candidate who "whacks up with the bosses and pays for what he wants" who receives the nomination.

Is it not about time we had an "Honest Voters' League" of the character suggested? The remedy lies with the people, if the people have only the nerve to apply it.

ALBION W. TOURGEE.

Mayville, N. Y., Aug. 10, 1894.

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