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The instigation of national prohibition on January 16, 1920 opened the door for the struggle between the ardent drys and the equally ardent wets, a subject of controversy which played an important role in the campaign of 1932 despite the grim reality of the depression.[1] President Hoover's administration formed the immediate backdrop for the ensuing crusade for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act. During his 1928 campaign Hoover promised to establish a commission to evaluate the noble experiment, and following his election he appointed an eleven-man study group which came to be known as the Wickersham Commission, receiving its appellation from its chairman, Taft's Attorney General George Wickersham.[2] Nineteen months later the group submitted a signed summary of their findings which advocated retention of the Eighteenth Amendment in addition to slight modifications of the liquor laws. Reports of individual members, however, negated the impact of the résumé, for only two of the commissioners personally supported the general report, while the remaining nine called either for repeal or for modification of national prohibition. The inconsistency probably resulted from the necessity of producing tangible proof of their extensive work;[3] but in spite of the overt contradiction, the group's findings provided an excellent statement of the futility of national prohibition in a country with neither deep religious mores against alcohol nor the

The Wickersham Commission having made its impact, Congressman Frederick R. Lehlbach of New Jersey instituted another attack on the dry law in the form of a resolution calling for absolute repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. However, the wets had not acquired sufficient strength; and consequently, Lehlbach's motion died in the Judiciary Committee of the House. Debate on the prohibition issue abounded in the opening sessions of the Seventy-second Congress, but the legislature failed to match its rhetoric with action for it anticipated the upcoming elections.[5]

Division over the noble experiment did not confine itself to government, for private groups began to align themselves on the issue. Leading the forces for the abolition of Volsteadism, the United Repeal Council of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment included the Voluntary Committee of Lawyers, the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform (W.O.N.P.R.), the Crusaders, and the Hotel Men's Association. Among those organizations that worked to retain national prohibition were the Anti-Saloon League, the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals, and the W.C.T.U.[6] The conventions of the national political parties took place in a setting where strong opinions had already formed in the minds of most Americans on this one point in dispute; and to a certain extent, the prohibition planks of the Republican and Democratic parties were drawn up with this sentiment in mind.[7]

The G.O.P convention met in New York in the early summer of 1932; and despite the immediacy of the economic crisis, the delegates began to thrash out the divergent views of the prohibition platform. As opposed to a "dripping wet" plank which the assemblage defeated, the

Hooverites proposed a declaration which would submit to the states the Eighteenth Amendment, altered to permit them to decide individually the liquor question, while at the same time maintaining the federal government's power to protect dry states and prevent the return of the saloon:[8]

> We therefore believe that the people should have an opportunity to pass upon a proposed amendment the provision of which, while retaining in the federal government power to preserve the gains already made in dealing with the evils inherent in the liquor traffic, shall allow states to deal with the problem as their citizens may determine, but subject always to the power of the federal government to protect those states where prohibition may exist and safeguard our citizens everywhere from the return of the saloon and attendant abuses.[9]

The Republicans having adopted a "moist" stand, the Democrats convened in Chicago in late June and agreed that prohibition should be repealed, even suggesting that Congress immediately modify the Volstead Act to permit the sale of light wines and beer. In addition, the Democrats delegated settlement of the liquor question entirely to the states:

> We urge the enactment of such measures by the several states as will actually promote temperance, effectively prevent the return of the saloon, and bring the liquor traffic into the open under complete supervision and control by the states.[10]

Editorial opinion in the News Leader, Richmond's afternoon paper, praised the action of the Chicago Convention for honestly approaching the liquor issue by admitting that the dry amendment was a mistake. Asserting that the party had not penned a wet plank, the editor noted that it simply entrusted control of the liquor traffic to the states which alone could effectively administer the law.[11]

The Democratic plan evoked a stronger reaction in Virginia's morning paper, the Times-Dispatch; and it reported greater divergences of opinion in the Old Dominion even among anti-prohibitionists. To some Republicans the Chicago platform provided a camouflage behind which Hoover could minimize the subject of economic readjustment, while some wet Democrats regretted the polarization of the issue which would dim the prospects for carefully scrutinizing the Hoover administration. Yet, the writer pointed out that on the whole, Virginians belonging to the wet party seemed to give assent to their leaders' stand.[12] The two major political parties had thus aroused great interest and concern over their stands on the dry law; and despite the attempts of the candidates to tone down the prohibition issue, the Times-Dispatch predicted from judging the intensity of the altercations following the conventions that the noble experiment would rank high on the scale of election issues.[13]

In addition to the major contenders, the November ballots held the names of two other political aspirants representing minor parties. Willis Upshaw of Georgia led the ticket of the Prohibition forces which urged absolute retention of the Eighteenth Amendment, coupled with its rigid enforcement. Having grown feeble under the pressure of propaganda, the anti-liquor party no longer commanded the following that it possessed in 1928.[14] The morning paper's opinion writer Thomas Lomax Hunter explained the loss of support in terms of its declining prestige among even the fervent drys who had since reassessed the liquor amendment and discovered its failure in promoting temperance. Hunter further asserted that many of the more liberal anti-repeal

forces would not cast their votes for a minor party that would certainly lose:

> The difficulty which confronts the prohibitionists of more liberal principles than those of the fundamentalists of the faith, is not how shall they express their convictions politically, but how shall they retain political power which they have grown to love.[15]

Rounding out the field of active parties, the Socialists nominated Norman Thomas as their Presidential hopeful and inserted a straightforward and explicit liquor plank which recommended the removal of the Eighteenth Amendment from the Constitution, placing direction of the liquor industry in the hands of the federal authorities and permitting local option on the prohibition question. Minimization of Volsteadism in their platform proved that the Socialists gave high priority to economic recovery and that they planned to waste little oratory on the wet-dry conflict.[16]

The four parties having recorded their positions on the noble experiment, the News Leader in mid-July noted that party affiliations already were breaking down over the issue of repeal. Classification of the divisions, according to the newspaper, included those who desired to maintain prohibition in its present status, others who yearned for the days before the Eighteenth Amendment, and a third category which embraced those normally wet who viewed Volsteadism as a failure, but who in reality favored temperance and fought the saloon system.[17] Still, the changing sentiment of many who saw the shortcomings of national prohibition had not made a great impact on Congressional leanings. Unmoved by the party statements and public discussion, the Senate voted down a bill to amend the Volstead Act to legalize beer and light wines, sending the legislation back to

committee.[18] Within two days Virginia's Senator Carter Glass brought before the upper house a constitutional amendment which permitted each state to settle the prohibition dispute. His plan would have retained Washington's authority to safeguard dry interests and oppose the return of the saloon.[19] The T.D. criticized the retention of centralized power in the Glass resolution since it stopped short of may American's desire for the deletion of the Eighteenth Amendment.[20] To editor Vincent Byers, Glass' proposal merely upheld federal control and incorporated the same evil of usurpation of state authority which was built into the existing law.[21]

President Hoover soon supplied the Richmond press with another opportunity to take a states' rights position when he departed from his party's passive plank on prohibition in his acceptance speech on August 11. The recommendation included state resolution of the wet-dry dispute with positive protections in the Consitution to prohibit the reappearance of the saloon:

> It is my conviction that the nature of this change and one upon which all reasonable people can find common ground, is that each State shall be given the right to deal with the problem as it may determine, but subject to absolute guarantees in the Constitution of the United States to protect each State from interference and invasion by its neighbors, and that in no part of the United States shall there be a return of the saloon system with its inevitable political and social corruption and its organized interference with other States.[22]

Because the Presidents's proposal resembled the Glass amendment in almost every respect, the Virginia Senator found it necessary to deny that he had aided Mr. Hoover in writing his speech;[23] simultaneously the Times-Dispatch editorial writer also noted the similarity and predicted that the President would suggest that Congress pass the Glass proposal at the next session.[24] Nevertheless, the Republican nominee did not demand the repeal of the liquor amendment nor did he advocate

substance. T. D. Washington correspondent Radford Tobley analyzed that Hoover was consciously making his propositions palatable to the liberal dry element.[25]

Explanation of the President's new position could be found in changing public opinion over the Eighteenth Amendment, according to the News Leader and the Times-Dispatch. An evening paper editorial conjectured that the Republican plank had not gone far enough in relation to the increasingly wet sentiment of the American people and that the party found it to their advantage to shift positions in Hoover's acceptance speech.[26] Thomas Lomax Hunter of the Times-Dispatch interpreted the address as a political move to gain votes, nothing more and nothing less. Any rationalization arguing that Hoover's shift resulted from discovering Volsteadism's unenforceable nature neglected the fact that only popular opinion had shifted while underlying principles of Volsteadism had not changed.[27] In similar fashion, Virginius Dabney recalled that in 1928 the Republican candidate sensed that electoral sentiment leaned toward the dry stand, and so he adopted an anti-liquor position; but when recent evidence indicated that the vox populi called for a change in the prohibition law, Hoover's conversion began, causing him to outdistance his own party's platform. Such a move on the part of the G.O.P. nominee classified him as a bolter of equal magnitude as Al Smith in 1928.[28]

The response to the main proposals in Hoover's speech of August 11 revolved around the issue of states' rights. Unlike the Democratic proposition to extirpate the Eighteenth Amendment from the Constitution without any retention of federal control, the Hoover plan would involve the same evils of governmental intervention inherent in the existing law:

> It is presumed, however, that, if Mr. Hoover and those of like mind with him were to succeed in setting up his liquor-control plan, an army of Federal agents, working out of a bureau authorized by legislation, would cover the country as do now the prohibition spies. No place of business, no home, would be free from their prowlings. For a time, at least, the Federal courts would grind away ceaselessly in the attempt to determine when a saloon was not a saloon, and vice-versa. In a lesser degree, we would go through the horrors of prohibition, with the hand of Washington out always to annoy American citizens.[29]

In like fashion, Thomas Lomax Hunter attacked the Hoover liquor statement because it would infringe on the rights of individual states. Although they would have the legal power to regulate the flow of alcoholic beverages under the Hoover plan, they would not enjoy the right to determine where the product cound be sold.[30] An evaluation of Virginia opinion in a Times-Dispatch editorial revealed that the majority of the Old Dominion not only opposed the plan, but also would reject the Republican party at the polls because of Hoover's prohibition stand, coupled with his failure to meet the dilemma of the depression. Virginia citizens did not dissapprove of the Eighteenth Amendment or the G.O.P. candidate's outline of control on the grounds that such systems foster crime and interperance, but because the underlying principles were basically wrong: "It violates our notions of what the functions of the Federal Government should be."[31] President Hoover had not gone to the limit of denouncing national prohibition, but instead rationalized his move on the basis of a break-down in enforcement. This was not far enough for the people of Virginia.[32]

The impact of the acceptance speech seemed to ring the death knell of the prohibition controversy; the dry fundamentalists had lost their only chance for a choice in November when President Hoover deserted them. While the path to the third party remained open, the moral votes cast for any minor candidate would be lost as far as influencing

policy after the election.[33] Breaking with their 1928 candidate, the Anto-Saloon League abstained from endorsing Hoover and the Republican party;[34] and the head of the Methodist Board of Temperance and Morals, Dr. Clarence True Wilson, severely scolded the President for defection from the noble experiment.[35] Struck by the desertion of his former leader, Bishop James A. Cannon, Jr. criticized the suggestions in the speech because they fell in line with the policies of those who would nullify the Constitution.[36]

Because of the withdrawal of the hard-core dry element, the Republican party would lose some of its support in the mid-West and the Southern border states which the Times-Dispatch forecast would spark a modification of the nominee's wet program.[37] In the meanwhile, the dry endorsement given to the speech probably damaged the President's position with the wets.[38] By August 17 the G.O.P candidate decided to refrain from future discussion of prohibition in order that he might keep the support of both elements that he still possessed at that time:

> The straddler's position is a very delicate one, and does not admit of a very detailed discussion, lest the jugglery be disclosed and one or the other of the opposing factions which he seeks to please, take umbrage and fall away from him.[39]

Hoover's strategy failed, however, when Vice-President Charles Curtis rekindled the issue in his Topeka acceptance speech on August 18. Declining to support his running mate's stand on prohibition, Curtis affirmed his allegeance to Volsteadism:

> I believe in meeting the issue squarely. I am a strong believer in the rule of the majority, and feel that the people should at all times be given full opportunity to express their opinion on the Constitution or amendments thereto, but, personally, I am opposed to the reutrn of the saloon, and I am opposed to the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.[40]

Several interpretations of the Vice-President's motive immediately appeared to the newspapers. Since Curtis received the nomination only after Charles Dawes rejected the convention's offer, the move could have sprung from the wish for political revenge.[41] Editor Vincent Byers explained the action in terms of the platform which did not bind G.O.P. party members on the liquor statement: Curtis had merely asserted his rightful individualism on the issue.[42] On the other hand, Thomas Lomax Hunter conjectured that the Topeka declaration was a bid for support of the staunch drys of the mid-West to counterbalance Hoover's wet stance.[43]

In his discussion of the Curtis impact, the morning editor surmised that wet party members would doubt Hoover's willingness to push for repeal in the next session of Congress,[44] while Hunter predicted alienation of the repeal element who would not want to associate with a party supported by men such as Dr. Dan Poling, chairman of the Allied Forces for Prohibition.[45] Moreover, the Times-Dispatch saw that the acceptance speech tended further to cloud the party's stand on the liquor question: "The result of Curtis' remarks is to leave the Republican stand on prohibition a hopeless quandary. . . ."[46] If the maneuver succeeded, no Presidential aspirant in the future would adopt a definite stand on any issue over which there existed a split in popular sentiment.[47]

As if the Rupublicans had not shifted their stand on Volsteadism enough at this juncture, Hoover sent a letter to Dr. Poling which the latter made public on August 23. The contents indicating that Hoover differed from the loyal drys only in the method he advocated to end the evils of the liquor traffic,[48] the message elicited a favorable

response from a segment of the prohibition forces.[49] Nevertheless, the victory was achieved at a sacrifice, for the morning editor believed that the gains made through Hoover's acceptance speech had thus been nullified.[50]

The Democratic candidate who had been relatively silent on the liquor debate during the month of Republican oratory responded to the G.O.P. stand on August 27 in his Seagirt Address. Blasting the equivocal position of the opposition party, Roosevelt reaffirmed his dedication to rid America of the Eighteenth Amendment which he believed utterly had failed to promote temperance and conversely had led to vast corruption. Stating that prohibition had channeled vast amounts of money into the hands of the criminal elements in the country, the governor tied the end of Volsteadism to the issue of economic recovery and advance. He asserted that increased tax burden would prove unnecessary if the government could effectively tap the wealth of the liquor traffic.[51] In an editorial of August 28, Vincent Byers praised the nominee's straightforward expressions and reasoned that the Republican dilemma naturally grew out of their shelving principles to win votes.[52]

When Roosevelt returned from his tour of the West on October 3, he had succeeded in creating an anti-Hoover feeling, if not a pro-Roosevelt mood, by showing the electorate that his policies were liberal, not radical. He spoke at Chicago on October 1, stating his hope that the wet-dry conflict would recede in order that public leaders could focus their attention on the fundamental crisis in the economic sphere.[54] In a sense this was prophetic for Hoover's organization grew alarmed at the response Roosevelt had evoked on his Western journey. Although the original plans had called for a passive campaign on the part of

the Republican candidate, the Democratic activity spurred Hoover to take to the road.[55] He toured during the month of October in order to counter the Roosevelt sweep, and at this time he concentrated on the tariff rather than the liquor question.[56]

The presidential race, however, did not overshadow the concurrent Congressional contests in 1932 because of the heated arguments over national prohibition. Largely as a result of the Republican's multifarious stand on the issue, many organizations turned to the election of wet or dry legislative candidates as the means to effect action on the liquor question.[57] In his humerous style, Thomas Lomax Hunter asserted that Congressional hopefuls would be the logical focal point for the effort since they bent toward whatever direction the wind of popular sentiment blew:

> It will not be necessary to turn out the current congressmen. They are quite amenable to reason. Just show them that the majority of their constituents have changed their opinion of prohibition and they will be wet in the twinkling of an eye, just as they became dry when that seemed to have the upper hand of the argument.[58]

John Stewart Bryan, editor and publisher of the News Leader, believed that the shrewd prohibition forces would shun strict party alignments; they would instead concentrate their efforts on sending to Washington lawmakers who supported the Eighteenth Amendment without regard to partisan affiliations.[59] As early as July 3 anti-repeal forces had indicated their dedication to the moral cause. Declining to endorse either Presidential nominee, they proclaimed a nonpartisan drive to secure the victory of dry candidates to the House and Senate;[60] and Dr. Poling promised that the Allied Forces for Prohibition would contribute funds for the same purpose.[61] The month of August produced similar responses from the followers of Volsteadism. The Anti-Saloon

League, headed by F. Scott McBride, realized that action on the liquor dispute would be initiated by Congress in the final analysis.[62] At the same time, the national W.C.T.U. committed itself to bipartisan work in the Congressional races in its meeting in Seattle.[63]

Looking at the opposing side, and August 19 editorial in the Times-Dispatch noted that the wets had begun a counterattack to match the efforts of the prohibition forces on the local level. It added that the candidates for the lawmaking body were enjoying the limelight in 1932: "For once the humble congressman becomes an important cog in the machine. It really matter both to wets and drys, that he have a definite opinion on at least one issue--prohibition."[64]

The focus on the dry amendment began to have an impact on the Virginia Congressional campaign by early September. The Times-Dispatch reported that Joel W. Flood, Democratic nominee from the old Tenth District, serving out the term of the deceased Harry St. George Tucker, had promised to support the move for resubmission if the subject appeared in the "lame duck" session of Congress. Second-District nominee Colgate W. Darden and A. Willis Robertson of the new Seventh District, both Democrats, planned to conduct their campaigns in support of the national party's position on the Eighteenth Amendment. Moreover, the paper predicted that all aspirants of Roosevelt's party in the house races would openly favor resubmission.[65] In a sense, the forecast came true for a September 18th survey of Virginia's Congressional candidates revealed that seven of the ten men running on F.D.R.'s ticket favored repeal, while the remaining three failed to respond. Only three of the eight Republicans replied to the questionnaire, and these supported retention of the dry law. In keeping with his party's stand, the one

Prohibition candidate A. J. Dunning stood firmly behind the maintenance of Volsteadism; and conversely the eight Socialist office-seekers called for the abolition of prohibition.[66]

The wet-dry conflict came into focus in a similar fashion in the Maine elections on September 13. Stronghold of Republicanism and prohibition, Maine swung into the Democratic fold when the governorship and two out of three Congressional seats went to the followers of Governor Roosevelt.[67] To most observers, the liquor question stood out as the one clear-cut issue since all of the nominees of F.D.R.'s party had fallen in line with the national platform and all of the Republicans had committed themselves to the dry amendment.[68] Times-Dispatch editor Vincent Byers evaluated the results of the Maine contest and indicated that the addage "as goes Maine, so goes the nation" applied. The Democrats did not need to poll more votes than the G.O.P. in order to assume that 1932 would be their year politically; the elimination of the "normal Republican majority" would suffice. Because Roosevelt's party not only eradicated the "majority" but also won a victory in their own right, the morning paper assumed that the results could be viewed as a national mandate for a new administration and repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.[69]

Although he labeled the vote a Democratic victory for the state, the afternoon editor did not see the election as the strong barometer of public opinion as did Byers. Reminding his readers that Maine had often supported the loser in previous election years, John Stewart Bryan suggested that the victors would be wise to accept the results as no more than an encouragement for renewed effort.[70] As for prohibition, Bryan interpreted the outcome in Maine as the bitter fruits

of the G.O.P.'s equivocal position regarding repeal.[71]

The popular mood expressing political upset in the Border State reappeared in the national election on November 8 when Roosevelt's party achieved a sweeping victory, carrying forty-two states.[72] Virginia contributed to the tidal wave by choosing nine Democrats to serve in the House as well as supporting Franklin Roosevelt for the Presidency.[73] (In the opinion of the News Leader, the vote did not settle the liquor question; that would ultimately be settled by the states. Since most of the candidates in both parties showed an inclination toward resubmission, the new Congress would simply allow the people to decide whether to continue national prohibition or to abolish it.[74] In reality however, the newly-elected body did not have the opportunity to deal with the problem because the "lame duck" session voted to surrender the issue to the states in the form of the Twenty-first Amendment. On February 16 the Senate approved the measure and Virginia's two Democratic Senators split over the question.[75] The House of Representatives passed the legislation four days later, all members from Virginia supporting resubmission. Surprisingly enough, even Menalcus Lankford, the one Republican in the delegation, had changed to favor the resolution).[76]

In considering the entrie campaign which culminated in the Democratic triumph in November of 1932 and the subsequent action of Congress in February of 1933, the Times-Dispatch asserted that economic readjustment and prohibition had been the two outstanding issues: "Perhaps the fairest way to put it is that the country has fastened itself with intellectual intensity upon the economic issue, while the prohibition question has aroused a tremendous wave of emotionalism."[77] Thomas Loxley Hunter

went a step further and contended that the liquor dispute had been the factor uppermost in the American mind.[78]

Despite the knowledge that Volsteadism played an important part in the campaign of 1932, at least in rhetoric, the overwhelming victory scored by the Democrats probably grew out of the economic plight affecting the voters.[79] The fact that the drys had no candidate who could influence the outcome of the Eighteenth Amendment lends credence to this assertion.[80] In the case of economic issues, however, the average man most likely did not articulate his stand because he did not comprehend the complexities that the depression involved. On the other hand, the ordinary voter, polarized on the issue, knew exactly how he felt about liquor and could readily explain the reasons for his stand.[81] Prohibition stood out in the campaign because it involved such extremes. With little or no middle ground for discussion, the Eighteenth Amendment evoked heated debates which partially masked the underlying discontent and confusion over the economic crisis.[82]

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[7]The Richmond News Leader, Nov. 8, 1932, 8 . Hereinafter referred to as News Leader.

[8]Sinclair, Prohibition, 375.

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[18]T. D. July 12, 1932, 1.

[19]Ibid., July 14, 1932, 1.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., July 29, 1932, 10.

[22]Ibid., Aug. 12, 1932, 2.

[23]Ibid., Aug. 14, 1932, 1.

[24]Ibid., Aug. 15, 1932, 4.

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[29]Ibid., Aug. 30, 1932, 4.

[30]Ibid., Aug. 13, 1932, 4.

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[41]Ibid., Aug. 20, 1932, 1.

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[45]Ibid., Aug. 22, 1932, 4.

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[47]Ibid., Aug. 22, 1932, 4.

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[58]T. D., Oct. 2, 1932, 12.

[59]News Leader, Aug. 15, 1932, 8.

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[81]T. D., Sept. 19, 1932, 6.

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