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## THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 22, 1975

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: DONALD RUMSFELD

FROM: ROBERT A. GOLDWIN

You asked me to look up the beginnings of the seniority system in Congress, in relation to the rule of Speaker Clarence Cannon.

The historical origins of the seniority system of choosing Committee Chairmen are complex, according to the best scholarly analyses (see accompanying chart).

But it is probably not inaccurate to simplify the story, somewhat as follows, if you want to give an historical comment on the present "reform" in the House:

The method of appointing committee chairmen has often been a matter of contention in the House of Representatives. There was a time, until around 1910, when the Speaker made all committee appointments, and there was a time when the party caucus made all committee appointments. That era was called King Caucus, and it was called a "reform" movement because it overthrew the one-man rule of the Speaker, "Czar Cannon."

When chairmen began to be selected primarily by seniority, around 1920, that was also looked on as a reform, as a way of ending the abuses of the caucus system.

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The seniority system was considered a reform because it gave party leaders much less control over the selection of chairmen and gave members much more freedom to vote their own mind.

Seniority, rigidly adhered to, had its abuses, no doubt. We must wait to see, however, how the newest "reform" will work.

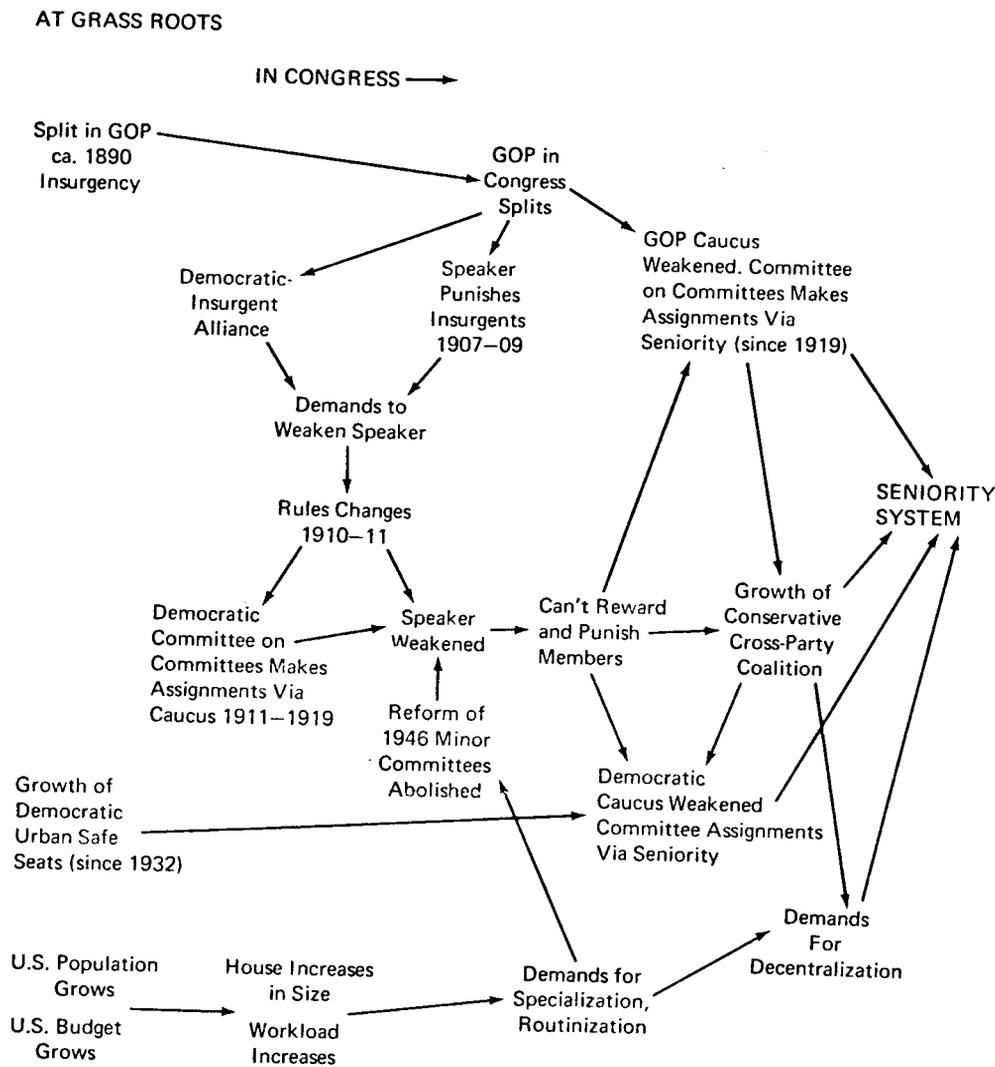


FIGURE 5 Historical causes of seniority system

coalition undermined the Democratic caucus.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, longer-term pressures for routinization and specialization were having marginal effects. This is the complexly interrelated set of historical "causes" of seniority as it exists today that we have attempted to diagram in Figure 5.

Seniority is also an ongoing social process that helps to maintain itself

by creating conditions favorable to its own perpetuation. Our speculation as to the important causal relations in this process and their connections with the processes that established the system are diagrammed in Figure 6.

To summarize, we believe that our data show the effects of four main influences upon the growth of the seniority system in the U. S. House of