

The Dry Party

by Joel Warner, Boulder Weekly; 11/1/2004. Originally posted: 11/1/2004:

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Earl Dodge, 71, has never tasted alcohol. Not a gulp of beer. Not a sip of wine. Not a swig of whiskey or a sniff of brandy. But that doesn't mean he doesn't know a thing or two about alcohol's vile aftertaste.

"I've never had cancer either, but I know it's something bad," says Dodge.

Growing up in a teetotaling Baptist family in Malden, Mass., Dodge read grisly stories in the paper about drunkards killing their best friends. He'd walk by taverns, and the smell from inside would just about knock him over.

But the truth about alcohol came when a teenage Dodge began helping out at a rescue mission in Boston. He assumed the alcoholics he'd be helping would be the stereotypical bums off the street. Instead, he stared into the rheumy eyes of priests, lawyers and other high-ranking members of society, all laid low by the evils of the demon drink.

Five decades later, Dodge, aka "Mr. Prohibition," is waging practically a one-man crusade against liquid licentiousness, one of the last vestiges of a once-mighty reform movement that (at least officially) dried up the nation's beer taps for 13 years. Out of his unlikely home base of Lakewood, Colo., a state where microbreweries dot the hills, the capitol's mayor owns seven bars and the golden boy of one of the world's biggest beer companies is running for one of the highest posts in the land, Dodge is stumping for president of the United States – for the sixth time – on the Prohibition Party ticket.

While his campaign might lack the greenbacks and glitzy ads of the two major presidential candidates, Dodge and the 2004 Prohibition Party rank with the big leagues with its share of scandalous internal controversies and colorful characters. And despite the minor roadblock of the 21st Amendment, which repealed Prohibition, Dodge and his supporters say their fight is far from over, and that, sooner or later, Alabama Slammers, Long Island Iced Teas, Manhattans, Irish Car Bombs, Tequila Sunrises, Three Wise Men and all the rest will be a thing of the past.

The Saloon Must Go

Dodge's brown brick home in Lakewood is the official Prohibition Party campaign headquarters, but you wouldn't know it from outside. There are no yard signs out front promoting the party's 2004 ticket (Dodge for president and Howard Lydick for vice

president), just a banner telling passersby to support our troops. If he's home, Dodge will most likely show you into the green-carpeted den and offer you tea or coffee – though no G-and-T's, thank you very much.

Once settled in, get ready for a long afternoon. After all, as Dodge says with a characteristic amiability, "My mother told me as a boy that I was vaccinated with a telegraph needle, so I tend to go on."

It's here, among over-stuffed bookshelves, old file cabinets, several computers and a small shrine to Calvin Coolidge, that Dodge runs the Prohibition Party. Forced to drop out of school in 10th grade after his father passed away, Dodge's career has run the gamut from insurance salesman to cemetery-plot hawker. But since 1957, give or take a year or three, his main occupation has been acting as either the national chairman or executive secretary of the Prohibition Party. Since the 1980s, he's voluntarily run the party without salary.

Dodge's charity is possible thanks to his side business – collecting and selling political buttons and other political memorabilia at trade shows and [on the Internet](#).

"Probably we have the largest collection in the country today," says Dodge of his wares, ranging from Socialist Party pins to a Franklin D. Roosevelt thermometer.

Somehow Dodge also finds time to run the 800-member Dodge Family Association, which he operates out of another room down the hall.

The current state of the Prohibition Party is less than imposing. In 2000, Dodge's presidential campaign garnered only 208 votes, down from Dodge's personal high of 14,000 votes during his first campaign and the worst showing by the party in nearly 130 years. The party's convention last year, where Dodge was nominated for president, totaled nine people, two of whom were Dodge's daughters. Colorado is the only state left that lists the Prohibition Party on its ballot.

It's sometimes hard to imagine that the Prohibition Party, the nation's oldest third party, was once a force to be reckoned with. The party was formed in 1869 by those concerned that Democrats and Republicans were ignoring moral issues – most notably alcohol, which churches had been labeling a social ill for decades.

With a two-humped pachyderm as mascot and the ax-wielding temperance zealot Carry A. Nation as its most notable representative, the Prohibitionist Party would go on to win more than 100,000 votes in each election from 1884 to 1920. There were Prohibitionist sheriffs and mayors, congress members and governors. And then came the party's crowning achievement in 1920: the 18th Amendment, which launched Prohibition. Unfortunately for the Prohibition Party and other temperance folks, the Noble Experiment failed – at least according to most sources today. After 13 years of alleged rum running, bootlegging, drive-by shootings and other cinematic lawlessness, the 21st

Amendment killed Prohibition – and with it the Prohibition Party. The last party candidate to be elected to office was in 1959.

"Prohibition as a general concept, historically, doesn't work. It did bring us NASCAR, which is a good thing. People seem to love that," says Stephen Powell, an expert on drinking in American culture. (Hard-driving rum runners became the first NASCAR drivers.)

"Basically [Prohibition supporters] lost their fire. They had their chance, and they failed. And I don't think anyone was particularly interested in trying to resurrect another movement to bring that legislated morality back. They lost popular support and just faded into the background as a bunch of whiners."

Dodge begs to differ.

"All of the facts and figures show that it did work," he says. "For the most part, the media is taking liquor-company advertising and painting the Prohibition era as an era of unparalleled lawlessness."

Prohibition was far from a smorgasbord of mobsters and Tommy guns, says Dodge. He points out that, during this period, U.S. alcohol consumption dropped by 70 percent, prison populations declined by 52 percent in some states, bank deposits soared from \$15.8 billion to \$28.9 billion and the fatality rate for cirrhosis of the liver plummeted by more than 50 percent. He adds that by the time Prohibition took effect, a majority of states already had prohibition laws. Dodge also says the amendment's repeal was caused not by public outcry but by behind-the-scenes dealings by the Roosevelt administration. And despite the fact that the Prohibition movement is nearly ancient history, Dodge says the dangers of alcohol are more pressing than ever. Dodge says there are 11 million alcoholics in the country today, and that liquor leads to hundreds of thousands of deaths and tens of billions of dollars in damages annually. It's ironic, says Dodge, that the government allows this destruction while banning drugs like marijuana, heroin and cocaine, which cause much less damage.

Despite its name, however, the Prohibition Party is about a lot more than just the devil's drink.

"The majority of the reforms that most people think are good were started by the Prohibition Party," says Dodge. Since its founding, the Prohibition Party supported the right for both women and African Americans to be able to vote and the direct election of U.S. Senators.

The 2004 Prohibition Party platform spans eight pages. Along with a return to Prohibition, it calls for, among other things, an amendment requiring Washington to balance the federal budget, a return to the gold standard, terminating the Federal Reserve, closing the gap between church and state, abolishing the Department of Education, researching the possibility of banning all immigration and, above all else, a limited

federal government. The last platform issue might seem surprising, considering Prohibition seems to entail increased government control over citizens.

"We believe the greatest threat to personal freedom is big government. The government can't be a nanny," says Dodge. "But alcohol is a different class. The costs have to be paid by the entire population. It just impacts every area of our life."

Dry vs. Dry

Dodge's race to the White House faces an added hurdle this year: Colorado voters will find two Prohibition tickets on their presidential ballot, that of Dodge and Lydick, and that of Gene Amondson and Leroy Pletton.

The dueling tickets are the result of internal struggles within the Prohibition Party that led to what some members are calling a rift. While several Prohibition Party members gathered at Dodge's house in the summer of 2003 and nominated him as their presidential candidate, a different group of people met that fall at a time share in Tennessee, calling Dodge's nomination void and coming up with their own ticket. While these dissidents have been forced to call themselves the Concerns of the People (Prohibition) Party, they say they are the true standard-bearers for the dry movement.

"This really is the Prohibition Party, which was organized in 1869 and has run candidates on the national slate every election since 1872," says James Hedges, a retired Marine Corps tuba player and one of the leaders of the breakaway group. "There has been a dispute over management of the party, and the other faction got the prohibition name first on the ballot, but we don't have the money for lawyers to sue each other, so we just adopted this other name."

Hedges and others say Dodge has helped drive the Prohibition Party into the ground, refusing to share control of the party and making financial decisions that are questionable at best. The smoking gun, says Hedges, is that Dodge sold the former Prohibition Party headquarters, a Denver condo, in 1999 to the tune of \$120,000. While he promised to use the proceeds to build an addition on his home to house party headquarters, Hedges says all that's been built on Dodge's property is a garden shed.

"So we're wondering where the \$119,500 is, allowing him \$500 for the garden shed," says Hedges. "He needs to welcome new people into the party, and he needs to share responsibility so they have something to do, and he has to have financial transparency." For their own presidential choice, the Concerns of the People (Prohibition) Party turned to Gene Amondson, a minister, painter and self-described "world's best pie maker" from Washington state who has a habit of touring the country re-enacting temperance sermons by famous ballplayer-turned-evangelist Billy Sunday or dressing up as the Grim Reaper and shaking an empty bottle of Jim Beam.

Despite the differences between Dodge and Amondson, the two prohibition parties' platforms are nearly identical.

"Earl Dodge and I both are agreed," says Amondson. "Even though our party is kind of split right now, we both know that dumb people drink, and we've got to get that message across."

Dodge has little regard for his new opposition.

"It's not a split from our party," he says. "It's just a couple of people. Sort of like a flea on an elephant that's trying to use our name to get some attention."

Dodge labels the heads of the dissidents, Hedges included, as disgruntled folks who were either kicked out or voted out of the Prohibition Party leadership. Dodge adds that most of their members, such as Amondson, have never been part of the Prohibition Party, and that those who were gave very little to the party in terms of funding or support. As for the party headquarters fiasco, Dodge says proceeds from selling the Denver condo went into a Prohibition Party investment fund and that he did build an addition onto his house to make room for the party office.

Howard Lydick, Dodge's vice presidential running mate, is also critical of the dissident group, but says the infighting is a good sign.

"I have been in active organized politics since 1947, and I am used to splits and people breaking off. We certainly had enough of those in the Republican Party in the past 50 years," he says. "[This division has] told me that [we're] not a pressure group, but a bona fide political party."

There's another reason why Dodge and his compatriots might appreciate the controversy. Thanks to the hullabaloo, the normally media-starved Prohibition Party has once again found itself in the national spotlight. CNN, NPR, the New York Times, the New Yorker and The Daily Show with Jon Stewart have all featured the unusual political clash.

With regards to the media attention, Dodge just smiles and quotes the old adage, "I don't care what they say about me as long as they spell my name right." After all, no matter what the newscasters and newshounds say, it will likely mean Dodge will beat his low of 208 votes come Nov. 2.

Tremble, King Alcohol

Members of both parties contending for the Prohibition mantle agree that the dry movement has suffered primarily because the elections have been rigged against third parties. They say the Democratic and Republican parties worked together to require prohibitively large numbers of signatures in order for third-party candidates to get on the ballots in most states. Colorado alone has not adopted these measures. Dodge and others are pushing to abolish such requirements.

"The main parties feel that the votes, by divine right, are theirs. And they feel if someone like Nader or Earl Dodge comes along, they are spoilers. If a third party has support in a state, the major parties work to suppress them," says Dodge.

Even if the Prohibition Party continues its slide into a footnote in the history books, Dodge believes Big Alcohol is actually on the run. The number of people who drink is down. Age limits and drunk-driving standards are becoming stricter. Major alcohol companies are diversifying into other interests, as if they know booze isn't a good long-term investment. While the first prohibition was based on moral issues, Dodge believes the next prohibition, like the crackdown on smoking, will be based on health issues.

"I think we are moving in the direction of prohibition," says Dodge. "I don't think it will be an amendment like we had before. I think it will gradually come about because people will finally say it is a health hazard, and eventually I think the FDA will regulate it, and then at some point, it will be voted out of existence."

Dodge doesn't harbor any illusions. He knows the only way he's likely to see the inside of the White House is on a public tour. And he knows he'll probably never see another prohibition in his lifetime. But he stands true to the maxim printed in every Prohibition Party newsletter: "A politician thinks of the next election. A statesman thinks of the next generation."

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