

# National Party Conventions 1831–2000

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Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice, the new party also had the support of Dr. Francis E. Townsend, leader of a movement for government-supported old-age pensions, and Gerald L. K. Smith, self-appointed heir of Louisiana senator Huey P. Long's share-the-wealth program.

Father Coughlin was the keystone of the Union Party and was instrumental in choosing its presidential ticket in June 1936—Rep. William Lemke, R-N.D., for president and Thomas O'Brien, a Massachusetts railroad union lawyer, for vice president. The new party did not hold a convention: The party's platform reportedly was written by Coughlin, Lemke, and O'Brien and was similar to the program espoused by Coughlin's National Union. Among the features of the Union Party platform were proposals for banking and currency reform, a guaranteed income for workers, restrictions on wealth, and an isolationist foreign policy.

Lacking organization and finances during the campaign, the party further suffered from the increasingly violent and often anti-Semitic tone of the oratory of both Coughlin and Smith.

The Union Party failed miserably in its primary goal of defeating Roosevelt. Roosevelt won a landslide victory and the Lemke ticket received only 892,267 votes (2 percent of the popular vote). The party standard-bearers were unable to carry a single state, and the Union Party's candidates for the House and Senate all were defeated. The party continued on a local level until it was finally dissolved in 1939.

#### UNITED WE STAND AMERICA (INDEPENDENT ROSS PEROT) (1992)

The presidential campaign of Texas billionaire Ross Perot in 1992 drew the highest vote share of any independent or third-party candidate in eighty years. Relying heavily on his wealth and on grass-roots volunteer efforts to get his name on the ballot in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, Perot received 19,741,657 votes or 18.9 percent of the nationwide vote. He did not win any sizable constituency or receive any electoral votes, but he drew a respectable 10 percent to 30 percent in popular voting across the nation. He ran best in the West, New England, the Plains states, around his Dallas base, in economically distressed parts of the Rust Belt, and in high-growth districts on Florida's coasts.

Perot, who announced the possibility of his candidacy in February 1992, ran his early unofficial campaign mainly on one issue—eliminating the federal deficit. He had the luxury of funding his entire campaign, which included buying huge amounts of television time. Drawing on the disenchantment of voters, Perot and his folksy, no-nonsense approach to government reform struck a populist chord. But he also demonstrated his quirkiness by bizarrely withdrawing from the presidential race in mid-July and then reversing himself and reentering in October. He chose as his running mate retired admiral James B. Stockdale, who as a navy flier had been a prisoner during much of the Vietnam War.

United We Stand America (UWSA), formed from the ashes of Perot's candidacy, did not bill itself as an official political party. Promoting itself instead as a nonpartisan educational organization, UWSA called for a balanced budget, government reform, and health care reform. While the group's leaders did not endorse candidates or offer them financial assistance, the leaders planned to hold incumbents accountable through election forums and voter guides ranking candidates on selected issues. Some state UWSA leaders suggested they would recruit candidates if incumbents were unopposed, or if the candidates from both parties got poor grades on UWSA issues.

After the election Ross Perot, rather than UWSA, commanded considerable attention on Capitol Hill. From marshaling grass-roots support on congressional reform to unsuccessfully opposing the

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Perot remained highly visible on the political scene. Democrats and Republicans were unable to co-opt his following as they had those of major third-party movements in the past. And Perot continued to use his supporters' anger with government and the political process to sustain himself as an independent political force. In the fall of 1995 Perot created a full-fledged political party, the Reform Party, and ran as its nominee in a campaign financed with federal funds. (*See Reform Party.*)

#### U.S. LABOR PARTY (INDEPENDENT LYNDON LAROCHE) (1973- )

Formed in 1973 as the political arm of the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC), the U.S. Labor Party made its debut in national politics in 1976. The NCLC, a Marxist group, was organized in 1968 by splinters of the radical movements of the 1960s. New Yorker Lyndon LaRouche, the party's chairman and a self-taught economist who worked in the management and computer fields, became its 1976 presidential nominee and Wayne Evans, a Detroit steelworker, his running mate.

The party directed much of its fire at the Rockefeller family. It charged that banks controlled by the Rockefellers were strangling the U.S. and world economies. In an apocalyptic vein, the party predicted a world monetary collapse by election day and the destruction of the country by thermonuclear war by the summer of 1977.

LaRouche's party developed a reputation for harassment because of its shouted interruptions and demonstrations against its political foes, including the Communist Party and the United Auto Workers. It accused some left-wing organizations and individuals, such as linguist Noam Chomsky and Marcus Raskin and his Institute for Policy Studies, of conspiring with the Rockefellers and the Central Intelligence Agency.

During the 1976 campaign, LaRouche was more critical of challenger Jimmy Carter than President Gerald R. Ford. He depicted Ford as a well-meaning man out of his depth in the presidency, but Carter as a pawn of nuclear war advocates and a disgracefully unqualified presidential candidate. LaRouche captured only 40,043 votes, less than 0.1 percent of the national vote. He was on the ballot in twenty-three states and the District of Columbia.

Although the U.S. Labor Party did not run a presidential candidate in the 1980 election, LaRouche ran a strident campaign—as a Democrat. By this time, LaRouche's politics had shifted to the right, and his speeches were fraught with warnings of conspiracy.

He continued his crusade in 1984 but as an "independent Democrat," dismissing Democratic presidential nominee Walter F. Mondale as an "agent of Soviet influence." LaRouche received 78,807 votes, or 0.1 percent of the vote, in the fall election.

In 1988 LaRouche again attempted to run as a Democrat but, failing the nomination, garnered 25,562 votes under the banner of the National Economic Recovery Party. On December 16, 1988, LaRouche and six of his associates were convicted on forty-seven counts of mail fraud and conspiracy to commit mail fraud. LaRouche was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

In 1992 the unflagging LaRouche ran again for president from his jail cell. As a convicted felon, he no longer had the right to vote himself. LaRouche ran as an independent although his name appeared on several state ballots under various party names, including Economic Recovery. His supporters, experienced in winning ballot access, placed him on the ballot in seventeen states and the District of Columbia. He received 26,333 votes nationwide.

In 1996 LaRouche's name disappeared from the general election ballot, although he continued to be a quadrennial entry in the Democratic primaries. LaRouche ran in the party's primaries in every

election from 1980 through 2000, with his best showing in 1996 when President Bill Clinton had no major opposition for renomination. That year, LaRouche drew nearly 600,000 Democratic primary votes (5.4 percent of the party's total primary ballots).

#### U.S. TAXPAYERS PARTY/ CONSTITUTION PARTY (1992- )

Making its second appearance in a presidential election, the U.S. Taxpayers Party was on the ballot in thirty-nine states in 1996. Its nominee, Howard Phillips of Virginia, drew 184,658 votes or more than four times his 1992 total of 43,434. Of the eighteen minor parties receiving at least 750 votes in 1996, the Taxpayers Party received the fourth highest total. Phillips, longtime chairman of the Conservative Caucus, founded the party to counter what he perceived to be a left-of-center movement by the Republican Party under George Bush. Failing to recruit rightist icons such as Pat Buchanan, Oliver North, or Jesse Helms to be the party's nominee, Phillips ran himself. In addition to taxes the party opposed welfare, abortion and affirmative action.

Phillips was nominated to run for president again in 2000, by which time the U.S. Taxpayers had changed its name to the Constitution Party, to more broadly reflect its conservative agenda. Phillips, though, was willing to step aside at several stages of the campaign when the prospect of the party nominating a more prominent politician was possible. First, it was New Hampshire Senator Robert C. Smith, a short-lived independent who returned to the Republican Party on the eve of the third-party's convention in September 1999. Second, was Republican presidential contender Alan Keyes, who indicated in the spring of 2000 that he might bolt to the Constitution Party if the GOP weakened the antiabortion plank in the party's platform. It did not, and Keyes stayed in the Republican Party.

#### WHIG PARTY (1834-1856)

Organized in 1834 during the administration of President Andrew Jackson, the Whig Party was an amalgam of forces opposed to Jackson administration policies. Even the name "Whig" was symbolic of the intense anti-Jackson feeling among the party's adherents. The name was taken from the earlier British Whig Party, founded in the seventeenth century in opposition to the tyranny of the Stuart monarchs. Likewise, the term was popular during the American Revolution, as the colonists opposed what they considered the tyranny of King George III. The new Whig Party was opposed to "King Andrew," the Whig characterization of Jackson's strong executive actions.

Southerners, enraged over Jackson's stand against states' rights in the South Carolina nullification dispute, joined the coalition early. Then came businessmen, merchants, and conservatives, shocked and fearful of Jackson's war on the Bank of the United States. This group, basically a remnant of the National Republican Party, espoused Henry Clay's American Plan, a program of federal action to aid the economy and tie together the sections of the country. The plan included tariff protection for business, a national bank, public works and distribution to the states of money received for the sale of public lands. The Clay plan became the basis for the Whigs' nationalistic economic program.

Another influential group joining the Whig coalition was the Anti-Masons, an egalitarian movement strong in parts of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Throughout its life, the Whig Party was plagued by factionalism and disunity. In 1836 the first presidential election in which the Whigs took part, the party had no national presidential candidate. Rather, three different candidates ran in different parts of the country—Gen. William Henry Harrison, Hugh L. White, and Daniel Webster—each

hoping to carry Whig electors in states where they were popular. Then the Whig electors, if a majority, could combine in the electoral college on one candidate or, if that proved impossible, throw the election into the House. But Van Buren, the Democratic nominee, won a majority of the electors.

Befitting their lack of unity, the Whigs adopted no platform in 1840 and nominated Harrison, a military hero, for the presidency. His campaign, emphasizing an apocryphal log cabin and hard cider home life in Ohio, resulted in a landslide victory.

But Harrison died only a month after taking office (April 4, 1841). The new president, John Tyler of Virginia, proceeded to veto most elements of the Whig economic program, including the tariff and reestablishment of the national bank. Given Tyler's well-known states' rights position—ignored by the Whigs in 1840 when they capitalized on his southern appeal—the vetoes were inevitable. The cabinet resigned in outrage, and for the rest of his term Tyler remained a president without a party. Because his first two years in office were the only ones in which the Whigs controlled the presidency and both houses of Congress, Tyler's vetoes spoiled the only chance the Whigs ever had of implementing their program.

The Whigs won the White House for the second and last time in 1848 by running another military hero, Gen. Zachary Taylor. Like Harrison, Taylor was a nonideological candidate who died in office. He was succeeded by Vice President Millard Fillmore.

The development of the slavery question in the 1840s and its intensification in the 1850s proved to be the death knell for the Whig Party. A party containing antislavery New Englanders and southern plantation owners was simply unable to bridge the gap between them. The Compromise of 1850, forged by Clay, only briefly allayed the controversy over extension of slavery into the western territories. Many southern Whigs gravitated toward the Democrats, whom they believed more responsive to their interests. In the North, new parties specifically dedicated to opposing the expansion of slavery (Free Soilers, Anti-Nebraskans, Republicans) attracted Whig voters.

The last Whig national convention, in 1856, adopted a platform but endorsed former president Millard Fillmore, already the nominee of the Know-Nothing Party. The Whig platform deplored sectional strife and called for compromise to save the Union. But it was a futile campaign, with Fillmore carrying only Maryland and winning only 21.5 percent of the national vote.

#### WORKERS WORLD PARTY (1959- )

With the Hungarian citizen revolt and other developments in eastern Europe providing some impetus, the Workers World Party in 1959 split off from the Socialist Workers Party. The party theoretically supports worker uprisings in all parts of the world. Yet it backed the communist governments that put down rebellions in Hungary during the 1950s; Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, and Poland in the 1980s. Workers World is an activist revolutionary group that, up until 1980, concentrated its efforts on specific issues, such as the antiwar and civil rights demonstrations during the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1980 party leaders placed Deirdre Griswold, one of its founding members, on the presidential ballot in ten states. Together with her running mate Larry Holmes, a twenty-seven-year-old black activist, Griswold received 13,300 votes. In 1984 Holmes ran as the presidential candidate, getting on the ballot in eight states and receiving 15,329 votes. In 1988 Holmes garnered 7,846 votes. Gloria La Riva ran as the presidential candidate in 1992 and was on the ballot only in New Mexico, where she received 181 votes. The Workers World Party dramatically improved its electoral fortunes in 1996. Its candidate, Monica Moorehead of New Jersey, was on the ballot in twelve states and received 29,082 votes.