
Politics at the
Periphery

*Third Parties in
Two-Party America*

J. David Gillespie

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Left and Right in the 1948 Election

One of the most famous and poignant photographs in history shows a beaming and vindicated Harry Truman holding up an early day-after-election edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Its bold but erroneous headline reads "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN." Later returns from the previous day revealed that incumbent Democrat Truman took over 24 million votes to just under 22 million for his Republican challenger. Truman's share of all popular votes was a substantial plurality, but most 1948 voters (50.41 percent) voted for his Republican and third-party opponents: Later the electoral college would cast 303 for Truman, 189 for Dewey, and thirty-nine for Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond.

The two important transient parties of 1948, the *Progressive party* on the left and the *States' Rights Democratic party (Dixiecrats)* from the right, clearly did not determine who won, for initially they had jeopardized Truman's candidacy, not Dewey's. The third-party standard-bearers were disappointed with the results. Progressive Henry Wallace in particular seems to have entered the race really hoping to win. The thwarted Dixiecrats had aimed to deny Harry Truman a majority of electors, thus throwing the decision to the House where southern pressure might water down Democratic civil rights commitments. These two third-party campaigns were significant challengers anyway, together taking nearly 5 percent of the vote. Given the passing of World War II, the nation's return to prosperity, and the narrow range and inherent controversy of these two third parties' primary interests, their November showings were remarkable.

The Progressives mainly intended to nip the Cold War in the bud before it could proceed further. They were in fact the first third party ever organized to protest foreign policy.¹³ Foreign policy as an issue is, except during war, almost always secondary, at most, in the voters' range of political interests. Dixiecrats had real concern about the liberal constituencies collected within the Democrats' New Deal coalition, about the prounion, anti-business drift of the national Democrats; but the Dixiecrats came to life as a party in protest of the national Democrats' developing commitments for civil rights. Dixiecrats proclaimed themselves to be the true Democrats, a corrective mechanism for the national major party far more than a deliberately created long-term third party. The essence of their insurgency—segregation, white supremacy, and states' rights—confined their appeal almost entirely to the South.

Henry Wallace gathered 2.38 percent of the national returns in the 45 states, all except Illinois, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, where his name appeared. In New York state, where he ran on the line of the locally

The Political Odyssey of Lyndon La Rouché

History never fully repeats itself, of course; but there are some intriguing parallels between Father Coughlin and his closest followers and Lyndon La Rouché, Jr. (also known as Lyn Marcus) and his very secretive "La Rouchians." You are not likely to see much of La Rouché himself in the immediate future; as of this writing he is serving a fifteen-year term in federal prison for mail fraud and conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service (La Rouché's cellmate for a while was disgraced former televangelist Jim Bakker). You may remember La Rouché's paid television messages during recent presidential campaigns in which he set forth a strange tale of Queen Elizabeth's involvement with drugs, KGB links to Walter Mondale, and a 3,000-year-old global conspiracy, now led by Henry Kissinger, which could be undone only by the "neo-Platonic guardian" La Rouchians.

La Rouché began his political activism in the late 1940s as part of the Socialist Workers party, a Trotskyist Marxist-Leninist group. He had ties with various elements of the New Left in the 1960s. In 1976 he won 40,041 votes as nominee of his own nominally Marxist *U.S. Labor party*. That party made the ballot of twenty-four states plus the District of Columbia.

During the 1970s he rapidly swerved from far left to radical right. By 1978 he was saying that "it is not necessary to call oneself a fascist. It is simply necessary to be one." La Rouché and the La Rouchians became decidedly anti-Semitic in their rhetoric. They had been known to spy upon, and are said to have infiltrated and destabilized, many leftist groups. They were in close contact with certain people in the Pentagon and the National Security Council during the first Reagan term. A Pentagon official praised the La Rouchians as a "conservative group . . . very supportive of the [Reagan] administration."

During the 1980s La Rouché and his followers largely eschewed the third-party approach, finding it more profitable to enter state party primaries and to utilize the open and accessible presidential selection methods now used by Democrats (and Republicans), to penetrate the Democratic party. When in the 1986 Illinois Democratic primary two La Rouchians defeated party-endorsed "real Democrats" for lieutenant governor and secretary of state, Adlai Stevenson III, the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, felt impelled to distance himself from the La Rouchians by withdrawing from the Democratic

line. Stevenson stood, unsuccessfully, as an independent. The GOP reaped the benefits from this Democratic debacle. La Rouchians were instrumental in convincing 2 million California voters to embrace an initiative proposition, ultimately defeated, for quarantining AIDS patients. La Rouché himself has collected millions in taxpayer-supplied federal matching funds in his campaigns for president.

La Rouché ran minor third-party or independent campaigns in 1988 and again (this time from his prison cell) in 1992.

Sources: Dennis King, *Lyndon La Rouché and the New American Fascism* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); David Corn, "Lyndon Who?" *The Nation*, 248 (June 26, 1989), 896-898; and Paul L. Montgomery, "One Man Leads U.S. Labor Party on its Erratic Path," *New York Times*, October 8, 1979.

influential American Labor party, Henry Wallace took 44 percent of all the votes he won in 1948.

The Dixiecrats took their 2.40 percent national share from just seventeen states. Nearly 99 percent of Thurmond's votes came from the eleven states that had joined the Confederacy during the Civil War. Unlike the more nationally based Progressives, the Dixiecrats' regional base yielded some electoral votes: the thirty-eight belonging to Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina plus the vote of one Democratic faithless elector from Tennessee. The Dixiecrats were the first and only third party since the Civil War to claim a bigger share of electoral than of popular votes. In much of the Deep South, sympathetic Democratic establishments arranged for Thurmond and his running mate, Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright, to run as Democrats rather than Dixiecrats in their states. Their victories in Alabama and Louisiana probably were due to their appearance on the Democratic line.¹⁴ Despite the concerted effort of their populist Democratic Governor Jim Folsom, November voters in Alabama did not even have the Truman option. Alabamians could vote for Thurmond or Dewey, for Prohibition's Claude Watson or even Progressive nominee Henry Wallace. But there was no slate of Alabama electors pledged to the sitting president who won the nation that year.

It is quite possible that without the Wallace and Thurmond factors, Truman might have drubbed Dewey by 416 electoral votes to 115 rather than by the much smaller margin actually turned in by the 1948 electors. Had there been no Dixiecrat revolt, Truman probably would have taken

those thirty-nine electors that cast for Thurmond. In New York, Michigan, and Maryland, states that collectively owned seventy-four electoral votes for president, Wallace's third-party tallies were larger than Republican Dewey's margin of victory over Truman. It cannot, of course, be proven that without Wallace enough of these votes would have been Truman's to give the three states to the Democrat; but many historians speculate that Dewey was indebted to Wallace for his victories in all three of these states.

1948 PROGRESSIVE The Progressives of 1948 were, as many older Americans still recall, among the most controversial transient parties ever to surface in American politics. The writing of their history even now evokes a lot of passion. These Progressives, unlike their Dixiecrat counterparts, did not begin as a group in an act of secession from the national Democrats. They did share with the Dixiecrats an important taproot in the Democratic party. Henry Wallace himself had been a prominent Democratic New Dealer, the secretary of agriculture during FDR's first and second terms and vice-president during his third. Roosevelt replaced him with Truman on the 1944 ticket but then appointed Wallace secretary of commerce. Wallace broke with President Truman, who fired him at Commerce in 1946, and that December Wallace and others seeking the creation of a new third party set up the Progressive Citizens of America. The Progressives met for an important strategy session in Chicago in January of 1948, then formally launched their new Progressive party in Philadelphia in July. In Philadelphia Idaho Senator Glen Taylor took the Progressives' nomination for vice-president. Wallace's running mate had been, like the man at the ticket's top, prominent in national Democratic circles.

But there was something else about the personality of the 1948 Progressive party. That party was one of the last hurrahs for a global Communist strategy first laid out in 1935 by Moscow, by the international association of Soviet-directed Communist parties called the Comintern, and in the United States by the Communist Party-USA. The line of the Communist Party-USA historically followed directives or signals emanating from the Soviet capital. Communist Party-USA was a member of the Comintern until World War II, when in an act of felicity toward his bourgeois allies Stalin formally abolished the Comintern.

In 1935, with the Nazi suppression of German Communists and the dawn of German aggression in Europe, the Comintern line had shifted from fostering proletarian revolutions worldwide to the Popular Front (or United Front). Following the Popular Front strategy Communists around the world sought, with considerable success, to persuade other "progressive forces" (socialists, liberals, and others) to enter into coalitions with

Panther activists. Sometimes operating indirectly, by fomenting inter-group warfare, the FBI at other times worked directly through death squad-type raids. One notorious example: the Illinois State's Attorney-directed (and FBI-instigated) predawn December 4, 1969, raid killing Chicago Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. It was a unilateral police barrage, with just one shot returned by the Panthers. An FBI infiltrator had supplied the floor plan, and most of the attack unit's bullets aimed for the bedrooms.

The suppression of defense evidence, sometimes even infiltration of the defense, and manufacture of prosecution evidence in Panther trials.

Think what you will about the Panthers themselves. Whatever you decide, our government's war on the Black Panthers (and other groups) violated the human rights and pluralism for which we have demanded respect by governments beyond America's boundaries. At the dawn of the nineties at least fifteen ex-Panthers still were serving time for events of their Panther days. Julia Cade of the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project declared all of them "political prisoners." Given the official record of vicious assault on their party, she makes a very strong point.³²

The Civil Rights and Feminist Communities: Party Options in the Nineties

Now, near the end of a century, many African-Americans are finding in the Democratic party a more congenial welcome than the party gave before. Jesse Jackson's 1980s campaigns for the Democratic party presidential nomination won serious attention from white Democratic leaders. (Some of their reactions bore far more the character of fear and consternation than of warm enthusiasm.) After the 1988 presidential election, Ron Brown came to chair the Democratic party. Brown was the first black ever to head a national major party. African-American Democrats won the mayoralty of America's largest city, the Virginia governorship, and the right to face ultraconservative North Carolina Republican U.S. Senator Jesse Helms. Helms won in a close election attracting worldwide attention.

Even so, the early 1990s brought charges that the Democratic party is taking for granted the support it receives from African-Americans and from feminists, environmentalists, and others who have been disaffected

by the rightward shift of the GOP. Suspicions circulate that the Democrats' top goal now is to woo back southern (and other) conservative whites who have been deserting to the Republicans, and that key white Democrats want to purge their party's public image as the party of minorities. The Democratic Leadership Conference (DLC), a group of moderate, mainly southern, Democratic leaders, worked diligently in the early 1990s to wrest any remaining power from the party's liberal wing so that the party might present a centrist face and a "winnable" presidential candidate to the electorate. The 1992 election of Bill Clinton, a DLC mover and shaker, validated for many Democrats what DLC had set out to do. But there also were worries that alienated progressives might leave the Democrats to help craft some new left-liberal party.

NEW ALLIANCE The Bronx was the birthplace for the New Alliance party (NAP) in 1979. NAP bills itself as a "black-led, multi-racial coalition of progressive people."³³ During the 1980s it worked alongside many groups opposed to Democratic Mayor Ed Koch and his "anti-black, reactionary" policies. NAP stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the Reverend Al Sharpton when Sharpton pressed black Tawana Brawley's claim, later discredited, that a white gang had abducted and raped her in suburban Dutchess County. The party takes anti-Zionist positions (associating, for example, with the Palestinian cause), but it strongly denies charges that it is anti-Semitic. NAP identifies itself with the struggle of lesbians and gay men. NAP's supporters claim that theirs is America's fourth largest party (just behind the Libertarians) and that it is moving up fast. It got that way, they say, because it did what the Democratic party would not do: it developed and pushed a genuinely progressive agenda.

Historians someday may recall that New Alliance was an organization offering itself in good faith as left-wing corrective or replacement for the Democrats. But there are observers now who charge that NAP's true identity is something other than what it claims. An investigative report in *The Nation* suggested that NAP's guiding light (and a prime reason for the party's considerable wealth) is one Fred Newman. Newman, who is white, is the founder and eminence in a neo-Marxist strain of psychotherapy known as social therapy.³⁴ The independent radical leftist *Guardian* newspaper has characterized NAP as "a cultlike organization once linked to right-wing Lyndon La Rouché" that seeks to infiltrate genuinely left-wing associations.³⁵ Stephen Schwartz, writing for the conservative Hoover Institution, called the party "a strange group of Black nationalists influenced by psychoanalysis (who) broke away from the La Rouché movement."³⁶

and gays, and people in general who were fed up with things. One group, based in New Jersey, called itself the New party. Another was set up by Ron Daniels. Daniels, who had served as Jesse Jackson's deputy campaign manager in 1988, christened his new movement the Campaign for a New Tomorrow. Daniels's name appeared on nine of the fifty-one presidential ballots in 1992. In some places he ran on the Peace and Freedom party line.³⁸

Like much of the left, Jesse Jackson in 1992 played faithful Democrat actively working for the election of Clinton-Gore. It remained to be seen whether a Clinton-led Democratic party would resist liberal pressures so as to root itself firmly in the center, and whether, if so, left-liberal disenchantment might take a substantial third-party course.

Notes

1. See Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), esp. 129-177.
2. See Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States*, 2d. ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), esp. 84-126.
3. NOW Executive Vice-President Patricia Ireland, quoted by Eleanor Bader, "Both Sides Now: In and Out of Two-Party System," *Guardian*, July 18, 1990.
4. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 167.
5. This account of the National Woman's Party is indebted to Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, revised ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1975); Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); and Evans, *Born for Liberty*.
6. Betty Glad, *Key Pittman: The Tragedy of a Senate Insider* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 53-54.
7. *Baltimore American*, March 4, 1913.
8. *Baltimore Sun*, March 4, 1913.
9. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 166-169.
10. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 276.
11. See Hanes Walton, Jr., *Black Republicans: The Politics of the Black and Tans* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1975).
12. David Harris, *Dreams Die Hard* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), 60-89; and Lawrence Lader, *Power on the Left: American Radical Movements Since 1946* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 164-165.
13. Lader, *Power on the Left*, 110.

14. Carmichael alienated many women from SNCC and from the nationalist movement in general when word passed of this demeaning macho Stokely utterance: "The only position for women in SNCC is prone." Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 87.

15. Lader, *Power on the Left*, 187, 191.

16. Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), esp. 367-369 and 486.

17. Lader, *Power on the Left*, 193.

18. The Youth International party (Yippies), a counterculture association that was more tongue-in-cheek than genuine third party, in 1968 nominated a pig named Pigasus for U.S. president. As an act it was part guerrilla theater, or theater of the absurd, and part humorous fun. Pigasus made no state's ballot, but did pick up some write-ins in November.

19. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963), 73.

20. Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), 308; also see 164.

21. Lader, *Power on the Left*, 268-269.

22. *Ibid.*, 335.

23. *Ibid.*, 217.

24. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 348.

25. See especially Hayden, *Reunion*, 339-412.

26. Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul On Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968).

27. Lader, *Power on the Left*, 246-247.

28. Davis and George Jackson, a Panther prison inmate, would later fall deeply in love. Jackson's 1970 *Soledad Brother* had made him one of the most famous prisoners in America. Jackson was shot and killed by a guard at San Quentin on August 21, 1971.

29. Early in the 1990s, Bobby Seale was serving on the Temple University faculty.

30. Quoted in "The Fate of the Panthers," *The Nation*, 251 (July 2, 1990), 6.

31. For example, David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: W. W. Norton and CO., 1981).

32. For details of the campaign to destroy the Black Panther party, see Frank Donner, *The Age of Surveillance* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980); Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO* (New York: Anchor Foundation, 1988); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters* (New York: Free Press, 1989); and "The Fate of the Panthers," *The Nation*, 6-7.

33. November 1, 1988 telephone interview with New Alliance party press secretary Annie Roboff. See *When Democracy Is On the Job, America Works* (1992 Fulani for President campaign booklet available from New Alliance party).

34. Bruce Shapiro, "The New Alliance Party: Dr. Fulani's Snake Oil Show," *The Nation*, 254 (May 4, 1992), 585-594.

withdrew from the Fourth International in 1940; but the party sustained its "fraternal" connection to that Trotskyist network.

Like CPUSA, its longstanding, bitter adversary on the left, SWP was for years the target of overt and covert hostile action by American government. In 1941 Cannon and seventeen other SWP leaders were convicted and imprisoned. It was the first Smith Act prosecution, eight years before Dennis and his fellow Communists were hauled into court. CPUSA actually pushed for conviction of the rival Trotskyists in 1941.²⁷ Weakened by the lockup of so many of its leaders, SWP yielded its hold on the Teamsters. That tangibly worsened the union's internal conditions; organized crime, stepping right away into the vacuum, substantially influenced the Teamsters over the years since.²⁸

In 1986 Federal District Judge Thomas Griesa awarded \$264,000 in damages in a suit SWP had filed thirteen years before. According to SWP's claim back in 1973, the FBI, through the COINTELPRO program, had been breaking law, systematically harassing and disrupting the party. A 1987 injunction by Judge Griesa barred the government from using any information about the party that it had collected in that context.²⁹

SWP's imprint upon the 1960s New Left was greater by far than the Socialists' or Communists'. That may be why J. Edgar Hoover had so fervently desired to make life difficult for the Trotskyist party. SWP's Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) was organized and active on many university campuses in the sixties. YSA members passed into other students' hands copies of *The Militant* (the party newspaper), periodicals and other SWP materials, and books printed by SWP's Pathfinder Press. YSA'ers were deeply involved in the anti-Vietnam and other sixties mass movements.

The extent to which the party should take part in such movements or in other ways participate in mainstream politics has provoked internal controversy over the years. SWP has been more loosely organized than CPUSA, with internal splintering endemic to party life. For years SWP has endured what seems to an outsider to be the most fickle membership on the radical left. Leaving at as rapid a rate as they came (in the 1980s and since at a far more rapid rate), SWP veterans have gone on to nurture and feed rival Trotskyist groups or other leftist associations or have landed in organizations firmly and permanently anchored in the mainstream. A few, like Lyndon La Rouché, trekked the full ideological distance from left end of the spectrum to right. Even so, it is SWP's self-image that it is a dedicated Leninist revolutionary vanguard party. The party has availed itself of every chance to condemn CPUSA for its

Popular Front and other "revisionist, soul-selling" Communist party accommodations with the mainstream.

SWP refrained from electoral politics in its early years; but it has never failed, since 1948, to offer a candidate for the presidency. The party also has contested hundreds of other races for Congress and for state and local offices.

SWP's internal strength peaked in the mid-1970s. Young Socialist Alliance membership stood at 5- to 10,000 at the close of the sixties. YSA began feeding substantial numbers into its parent party a few years later. Presidential nominee Peter Camejo took nearly a tenth of a million votes in 1976. Formal membership in his party then stood at some 2,500; several times that many were attached in spirit and supportive. Late-1970s SWP national conventions could bring out almost 2,000 people, most of them under thirty years old.

From the early 1980s on, SWP deserted its strident, polemic anti-Soviet rhetoric and began to adopt a critical support stance toward the U.S.S.R. (SWP hostility toward CPUSA continued on largely unabated). SWP became downright glowing in its treatment of socialist regimes in the developing states: Nicaragua's Sandinista government, for instance, or Castro's Cuba.

The party fell on hard times in the 1980s. SWP leaders were forced to make an embarrassing admission late in that decade: departures from SWP were so outpacing the volume of entries that the party had shrunk to half the size it had been just ten years before.³⁰ Outside commentary about the party early in the 1990s often began with the adjective "fading." From its national headquarters in lower Manhattan, SWP was holding on to its newspaper and book publishing operations, still maintaining a network of some thirty-five bookstores that also served as meeting places for party locals.

Other Left-Doctrinal Party Sects

The world Trotskyist movement always has been riven by sectarian division. Trotskyists argue over issues that seem esoteric or meaningless to folks outside the Trotskyist faith. Back in his succession struggle with Trotsky, Stalin had declared that Soviet and world communist resources should be devoted first to building socialism in the Soviet Union. Vigorously disagreeing, Trotsky said the first focus must be on instigating and supporting communist revolutions worldwide. Some Trotskyists inferred therefrom an obligation to be redder, more thoroughly communist, than the Stalinists. Other Trotskyists, revulsed by the brutal