

Where They Stand: The Libertarian Party and Its Competition, 1968-1978

by Peter de Rosa

Department of History, Marquette University

When analyzing election results, the Libertarian Party and other elements of the movement focus usually on the LP's current political star in order to prove that the libertarian cause is advancing. Examples of this policy can be seen in the euphoria surrounding Hospers' electoral vote in 1972; MacBride's showing and the LP's "Third Largest Party" status in 1976; and Ed Clark's 377,960 votes for California Governor in 1978.

The Libertarian Party has every reason to feel gratified by these results. However, a party that relies on one showcase victory for each election is probably doomed to extinction. Each election year finds some 500 Senators, Congressmen, and Governors up for re-election but few of these find opposition outside of the major parties. To be viable on the national political scene, a minor party must build local organizations that will enable them to contest every elective office. Otherwise, the major parties will continue to control the political process by default.

The LP's title of "America's Third Largest Party" cannot rest forever on the 1976 Presidential campaign. A single race is affected by too many variables (such as the candidate, the opposition, finances, publicity, and the weather) that belie the final result's ability to demonstrate a lasting trend. In the case of the LP, the transition from 1972, where John Hospers received less than 4000 votes, to 1976, where MacBride finished ahead of the other minor party candidates, is not a reliable measure of the party's progress. In 1972 Hospers was the last-minute choice of a newly established political party. In 1976, MacBride's fourth-place showing was aided by the inability of the American and American Independent Parties to unite on a single nominee. The AP nominated Thomas Anderson, who appeared on eighteen state ballots, while the AIP ran Lester Maddox in nineteen states. By contrast, MacBride was placed on thirty-two. The ballot-status factor enabled the LP ticket to edge out both the AIP and AP slates nationally. In head-to-head contests with these parties, the LP lost eleven out of eleven to Anderson and eleven out of sixteen to Maddox. A combined AIP/AP slate would have defeated the LP fairly decisively. It can be argued that the LP did

defeat those parties individually and that should be what counts. However, it should be noted that the AIP and AP organizations have agreed to merge as they did in 1972. On the basis of the 1976 results, it would seem likely that the LP could lose its third-place status in 1980.

To determine the respective strengths of the various third-parties in the United States, better results are obtained when the totals for candidates for other offices are compared. This study is intended to compare the showings of the national minor parties in terms of the results for contests for Senate, Congress, and Governor for the years 1968 through 1978. This type of comparison offers the advantages of: (1) results for six elections instead of only three Presidential elections, (2) consideration of a greater number of candidates and therefore a better indication of local party strength, (3) a test of 1976 LP claims in light of the 1978 elections, and (4) a guide to where the non-major party vote goes every year.

In compiling these results, I have excluded one-election parties, independents not affiliated with a third-party, major party members running as independents, and one-state parties such as the Liberal and Conservative Parties of New York. Essentially, this leaves the candidates of the national minor parties: the LP, Socialist Party, Socialist Labor Party, Socialist Worker Party, Prohibition Party, Communist Party, and the U.S. Labor Party. A special problem is posed by the various radical groups (Peace and Freedom Party, People's Party, La Raza Unida) and the right-wing factions (AIP, AP, and their fellow travelers). In both cases, one branch of each movement usually dominates radical or archconservative politics in each state and it is rare for these parties to compete among themselves in a particular state despite the presence of rival national organizations. Hence, I have combined the conservative totals under the notation 'right-wing' and the radical parties under 'left-wing' on the charts. This method demonstrates the showings for each group, but it should be remembered that these categories do not refer to unified organizations. Where possible, third-party candidates running as independents have been included in the totals for their respective parties. Write-in candidates are also contained in the election results if their votes have been recorded.

The 1968 Election

American minor parties accomplished little electorally in 1964. The Democrats and Republicans were challenged only by the Socialist Labor Party (founded in 1888 by Marx literalists), the Socialist Workers Party (a 1928 Trotskyite spinoff from the Communist Party), the Prohibition Party, the racist National States Rights Party, and the Constitution Party (another group that found Senator Barry Goldwater too liberal). Together they polled one-fifth of one percent or 108,000 votes. This was the weakest showing for third-parties since 1876. Other groups were even weaker: the Communist Party had not run a Presidential candidate since 1940 (they endorsed

LBJ in 1964), and the remnants of Norman Thomas' Socialists had not competed since 1956.

The situation changed drastically in four years. By 1968, disillusionment with the Vietnam War and the Great Society created vast opposition to President Lyndon Johnson. This discontent was not represented adequately in the two-party system and groups on both the Right and Left sought third-party alternatives. The strongest of these factions was the American Independent Party, the vehicle for Governor George Wallace's try for the Presidency. Wallace had planned his run since 1964 and he presented a tempting alternative for conservatives from both parties looking for a protest candidate. Wallace's AIP attained ballot status in all fifty states and he received almost ten million votes. Nationally, the AIP was Wallace's creation and was concerned solely with electing him to the White House. It made no attempt to encourage local candidates or to build state party organizations. In other words, Wallace had no intentions of creating a permanent third-party. Despite Wallace's intention, however, some sixty candidates in fourteen states campaigned under the AIP or allied parties' banners for major state and Federal offices. Although Wallace campaigned for some of these people (notably Senatorial candidate George Mahoney in Maryland), most ran without his support or permission. Together they received 493,782 votes and finished higher than any other party.

The Left also engaged in third-party activity after Robert Kennedy's death and after Eugene McCarthy's loss at the Chicago Democratic Convention had left the antiwar factions without a major-party alternative. McCarthy refused to run as a 'fourth-party' candidate (he did consider the idea, however), but his supporters were able to place him on the ballot in Arizona and conduct write-in campaigns for him in several states. Three other states qualified unpledged elector slates under the New Party banner. These efforts gave McCarthy 27,895 votes in nine states.

The Peace and Freedom Party spawned rival campaigns by Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver and comedian Dick Gregory. Cleaver polled 36,565 votes in seven states while Gregory received 47,133 in eight. Additionally, twenty-nine leftist candidates competed in nine states and they amassed 190,065 votes, mainly from California.

The older parties were paced by the Socialist Labor Party whose Presidential candidate out-distanced the radical groups individually, but their major candidates lagged behind the radical totals. 1968 also saw the first Communist Party nominee for President since 1940. Final results for 1968 can be seen in Table 1.

In 1968, nearly 140 million votes were cast for Congressional and gubernatorial candidates. About three million of these (2.2 percent) went to independent and third-party challengers. No minor party candidate was successful but Wallace polled 13.5 percent of the Presidential vote which is the best showing for a third-party nominee since 1924.

TABLE 1
1968 Election Results*

Party or Grouping	Presidential Vote	# States Reporting	Votes for Major Candidates	# Major Candidates/ # of States	Total Vote
AIP & allies	9,917,433	50	493,782	62/14	10,411,215
Left-wing	113,129	20	190,065	29/ 9	303,194
Socialist Labor	52,588	15	63,343	19/ 8	115,931
Socialist Worker	41,389	20	15,133	12/ 8	56,522
Prohibition	15,123	12	22,635	7/ 3	37,758
Communist	1,075	4			1,075

- * The term 'Major Candidates' includes anyone running for the Senate, the House of Representatives, or Governor. Left-wing totals include those for Gregory, Cleaver, McCarthy, the unpledged states, Ventura Chavez (People's Constitutional Party), and Kent Soeters (Berkeley Defense Group). Wallace's figures include those from the AIP elector slate in Alabama. For sources, see the end of the article.

The 1970 Election

1968 left radical and conservative parties in the field and both possessed the potential for growth among antiwar and antigovernment voters. However, both groups were plagued by disunity. The Peace and Freedom Party consisted of a loose coalition of the two P&F slates plus the remnants of the New Party and McCarthy efforts. The general distrust of authoritarian structures within the left-wing movement prevented the formation of a viable national party. In 1970, their twenty-six candidates received 202,956 votes.

On the Right, the AIP was ignored by Wallace after the election as he shifted his focus to the Democratic Party. None the less, his supporters decided to carry on without him. In February 1969, AIP delegates held a convention in Louisville which Wallace refused to attend. A committee was formed to organize the AIP as a national third-party independent of Wallace and the group elected William Shearer as its chairman. Shortly after this, conventions in Dallas and Cincinnati transformed the Association of Wallace Voters into the American Party under T. Coleman Andrews, Jr. Together, these parties ran 123 candidates in 1970 and they received 937,118 votes. This was about double their 1968 showing. Approximately sixty percent of the right-wing vote went to AIP candidates. The highest percentage in a three-way race went to the AP's candidate for New Hampshire Governor (9.9%), and eighty-three of the AP/AIP candidates received over one percent of the vote in three-way races.

Among the older parties, the SLP again finished third among the third-parties with its twenty challengers earning 101,141 votes. Only one of these

received over one percent while candidates from the Communist and Prohibition Parties failed to reach this mark at all.

Out of a total of 274 third-party and independent candidates in 1970, only James Buckley in New York (Conservative Party) and Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr. (Ind-Va.) won elections, both for the Senate. Overall, the non-major party candidates polled about 5.695 million votes, or about four percent of the 142.4 million votes cast in major races.

Final results for 1970 are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2
1970 Election Results*

Party or Grouping	Votes for Major Candidates	# Candidates / # States
Right-wing	937,118	123/29
Left-wing	202,956	26/ 7
Socialist Labor	101,141	20/ 9
Socialist Worker	60,199	20/ 9
Prohibition	21,878	4/ 3
Communist	12,231	3/ 1

- * Left-wing totals include P&F, La Raza Unida, New Party, and People's Constitutional slates. Right-wing includes AIP, AP and Conservative Party of Kansas.

The 1972 Election

1972 found the AIP/AP movement without its 1968 standard-bearer, who decided to run in the Democratic primaries. Wallace toyed with the idea of another third-party run but Arthur Bremer ended that possibility. Had Wallace decided to run as an independent, he would have faced legal problems in several states which did not allow candidates in a partisan primary to run in November on another ticket.

The AIP and AP decided to unite and they held a joint convention in Louisville. The party nominated Congressman John Schmitz (R-Calif.) who was an outspoken conservative critic of Nixon. Schmitz was available for the nomination as he had been recently defeated in his district's primary by a Republican party loyalist. The sentiment for Wallace at Louisville was not abated until after the Governor pleaded with the delegates by telephone asking them not to nominate him.

Schmitz appeared on thirty-two state ballots, and seventy-five other candidates competed in twenty-one states. Together, the AIP candidates received 1,531,698 votes, but only 418,411 of these came from the non-Presidential races. This represents about one-half of their 1970 showing. Schmitz's best percentage was in Idaho (9.3%), while forty-four of the AIP candidates received over one percent of the vote in three-way races.

By 1972, the People's Party had emerged as the umbrella organization for the various radical parties. The LRU did not join this group formally, but their leaders worked closely with the PP in several states. The People's Party faced a major problem in 1972: George McGovern's nomination by the Democrats. Sensing a chance to put an antiwar person in the White House, many PP activists preferred to work for McGovern rather than party nominee Dr. Benjamin Spock. In fact, the Southern branch of the party seceded openly from the organization and backed the Democrat. Spock received 78,838 votes in fourteen states (70% of these from California), and twenty-four other candidates polled 396,488 votes—roughly double their 1970 totals. Eighteen PP members or allies received over one percent in three-way races with the highest total coming in the LRU's race for Texas governor (6.3%—214,118 votes).

The 1972 election also saw the debut of the newly-formed Libertarian Party. The LP placed its nominee, Dr. John Hospers, on the ballot in two states and qualified one Congressional candidate. Hospers received 3680 votes (as well as one electoral vote), but the LP claimed 1095 more from write-ins. The LP slate received 5708 votes for its 1972 races although some votes were never recorded for write-in candidates for Congress. The Libertarian Vice-Presidential nominee (Theodora Nathan) became the first woman in the U.S. to receive an electoral vote.

Among the older third parties, the SWP received the most votes. Only Boston Congressional candidate John Moakley, running as an independent, was successful out of a total of 238 non-major party challengers. Moakley later rejoined the Democratic Party. Of 132.6 million votes for major offices, 2.1 percent went to independent and third-party candidates. The Republican and Democratic Parties received 98.1 percent of the Presidential vote.

Final results are found on Table 3.

The 1974 Election

The AIP returned to its old ways in 1974 by redividing into its AIP and AP factions. The split occurred after Thomas Anderson defeated William Shearer and John Schmitz for party chairman. Shearer led his AIP faction out of the party and Schmitz rejoined the Republicans. Despite this turmoil, the two groups made their best showing ever for major offices when their 105 candidates polled over 1.35 million votes. Two of their candidates received over fifteen percent in three-way races and eighty-two went over the one percent mark. By minor party standards, this was an impressive year for the AIP and AP.

The People's Party and its allies also improved their major candidate totals over 1972, picking up about 7300 votes. Roughly one-fourth of these came from La Raza Unida candidates. The PP was still weak structurally. They fielded candidates in only five states and their 1973 convention drew

TABLE 3
1972 Election Results*

Party or Grouping	Presidential Vote	# States Reporting	Votes for Major Candidates	# Major Candidates/ # of States	Total Vote
American Ind.	1,113,287	44	418,441	75/21	1,531,698
Left-wing	78,838	14	396,488	24/ 9	475,326
Socialist Worker	97,258	26	143,885	30/11	241,143
Socialist Labor	53,814	15	56,939	14/ 8	110,753
Prohibition	13,505	5	44,013	12/ 3	57,518
Communist	25,599	18	14,819	7/ 4	40,418
Libertarian	3,680	7	2,028	1/ 1	5,708
Socialist			221	1/ 1	221

* Left-wing includes P&FP, PP, LRU, Human Rights, and Liberty Union candidates. The SWP totals include 30,945 votes from Arizona. They received this total after many voters took advantage of the ballot machines' set-ups which allowed them to vote twice for President. The SWP's votes were ordered counted. Only Presidential totals are counted on the tables from the District of Columbia. Votes for Delegate and Mayor are not included.

less than fifty delegates. Like the AIP/AP factions, however, their organizational limitations did not prevent their slates from polling respectable totals. Both the Right and the Left seemed to have profited from the post-Watergate suspicion of the major parties.

On the far left, the SWP maintained its number one status but it found itself under challenge from a new group. This was the United States Labor Party which is the political branch of the National Caucus of Labor Committees. The N.C.L.C. is a 1968 splinter group from the Students for a Democratic Society. The USLP in 1974 was noted mainly for its attempts to break up other leftist meetings violently.

This election also saw the Libertarian Party's first serious assault on the American electoral system. The LP ran ten candidates in eight states but only two finished over one percent. Party leaders were disappointed as their best candidates made insignificant showings and New York gubernatorial candidate Jerome Tuccille failed to receive the 50,000 votes necessary for ballot status. However, the LP did finish fourth among the minor parties and it passed the 100,000-vote mark. In this survey, only three parties (SWP, PP, AIP/AP) have done that more than once. Furthermore, LP members in California dominated the Peace & Freedom Party state convention and ran several libertarians on the P&F slate.

In 1974, 345 independent and third-party candidates received 2.9 percent of 135 million votes for major candidates. James Longley, an independent candidate for governor of Maine, was the only successful one of these.

Final results for 1974 are listed in Table 4.

TABLE 4
1974 Election Results*

Party or Grouping	Votes for Major Candidates	# Candidates/# States
Right-wing	1,349,014	105/ 28
Left-wing	403,777	24/ 6
Socialist Worker	182,470	37/ 9
Libertarian	103,815	10/ 8
Prohibition	69,474	11/ 4
U.S. Labor	65,022	33/11
Communist	33,914	9/ 8
Socialist Labor	17,276	12/ 5
Socialist	5,113	1/ 1
Workers	681	2/ 2

* Right-wing includes AIP and AP nominees. The AP received about 56 percent of this vote. Left-wing includes P&FP, PP, HR, LRU, LU, and Freedom and Liberty totals. The Workers Party is a Maoist group which has run candidates since 1974. Its full name is the Workers World Party.

The 1976 Election

Third-party activity in 1976 was spearheaded by an independent who disdains political parties: Eugene McCarthy. After the dismal failure of his 1972 try for the Democratic nomination, McCarthy decided on an independent race. He attempted to gain ballot status in all fifty states but he succeeded in only twenty-nine. While McCarthy had some success in challenging ballot laws that discriminated against minor parties, he was often met with legal counter-attacks, notably in New York, from Democratic state organizations that saw him as a threat to Carter's campaign.

McCarthy aimed his campaign at liberal voters who were uncomfortable with the Democratic nominee. Geographically, this entailed intensive efforts in the Northeastern states and those areas which were receptive to his 1968 Presidential campaign, such as Wisconsin and Oregon. In all, McCarthy polled 756,731 votes in forty-three states and he probably cost Carter Maine, Iowa, Colorado, and Oklahoma. McCarthy's goals for the campaign were to receive five percent of the vote, attain a balance of power situation, and destroy discriminatory ballot laws. Although he earned less than one percent of the vote, McCarthy did achieve some success in his other aims. After the election, McCarthy prevented his followers from using his vote totals to form a new party. Despite this, some of his supporters are attempting to organize the Citizens' Party which may have the potential to appeal to liberals dissatisfied with the Carter Administration.

The AIP and the AP continued their turbulent courses. In 1975, the AP

nominated Thomas Anderson over ex-Congressman John Rarick for President. The defeated Rarick then led the Idaho, Louisiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin organizations out of the AP. These groups formed the American Independence Party which then merged with the AIP. The AIP received more new converts when *National Review* publisher William Rusher and direct-mail wizard Richard Viguerie decided to use the AIP as the means to build a new Conservative ('New Majority') Party. If successful, this party would have replaced the Republicans as the other major party. Rusher's strategy failed when he was unable to produce a prominent conservative willing to run on the AIP ticket.

The AIP regulars under Shearer were still the controlling faction in the party. This group supported former Georgia Governor Lester Maddox for the nomination, believing that he would generate the publicity necessary for the party to poll five percent of the vote. (This is the amount needed to qualify for federal funding as a minor party.) In Chicago, Maddox triumphed over Rarick (representing the American Independence faction), and Judge Robert Morris (Rusher's candidate). After the convention, the Rusher/Viguerie faction left the organization.

The August date of the Chicago gathering hurt the AIP's ballot drive and Maddox was on in only nineteen states. His ticket polled 171,000 votes and finished some 10,000 votes ahead of Anderson. Both slates finished behind the LP's Roger MacBride. All told, the right-wing parties received less than a million votes for their combined Presidential, gubernatorial, and Congressional candidates. In terms of total votes and percentages, the AIP/AP factions trailed behind their 1974 totals.

The Libertarian Party continued to make gains in the 1976 election. In addition to their fourth-place Presidential showing, they ran fifty-five candidates and eleven received over one percent. The LP polled 355,296 votes (triple their 1974 showing) and finished second among the minor parties. Additionally, MacBride led all minor-party candidates for President by garnering 5.5 percent of the vote in Alaska which made him the only candidate to break the five percent mark anywhere.

There were several other noteworthy developments in 1976. An attempt to form a black political party foundered when the National Black Political Assembly failed to place its nominee—Frederick Douglass Kirkpatrick—on the ballot anywhere. The Socialist Party ran its first Presidential candidate since 1956 by nominating former Milwaukee Mayor Frank Zeidler. The SP attempted to form alliances with some of the People's Party state organizations, but they chose to support PP nominee Margaret Wright. Wright made little impact, polling less than 50,000 votes, with eight-five percent of these coming from California. The left-wing totals for major candidates fell to one-half of their 1974 showing and this faction fell to third place among the minor parties.

The older parties were paced by the Socialist Worker Party which

finished behind Anderson. The Communists made their best showing since 1936 and the SLP made one of its worst. Finally, voters in Nevada could elect the alternative 'None of the Above' in the Presidential race and 5108 people chose this option.

In all, minor-party and independent candidates received 1.9 percent of the Presidential vote and 2.3 percent of the major candidate totals. They were hampered by the new Campaign Reform Act which cut them off from large contributions while not allowing them to raid the Treasury for campaign expenses. Additionally, the third parties were excluded from the League of Women Voters' debates although McCarthy and the LP, AP, AIP, and SWP candidates sued for inclusion or equal time. These efforts failed, as well as suits by the USLP to overturn the election results. Final results for 1976 are stated in Table 5.

TABLE 5
1976 Election Results*

Party or Grouping	Presidential Vote	# States Reporting	Votes for Major Candidates	# Major Candidates/ # of States	Total Vote
Right-wing	332,242	44	644,027	107/28	976,269
Libertarian	173,373	45	181,923	55/16	355,296
Left-wing	49,025	11	193,044	20/ 7	242,069
Socialist Worker	91,314	36	149,254	29/12	240,568
U.S. Labor	40,050	29	154,344	70/16	194,394
Communist	59,145	29	43,402	6/ 6	102,547
Socialist Labor	9,621	20	75,446	10/ 7	85,067
Prohibition	15,947	14	3,306	5/ 3	19,253
Socialist	6,038	13	7,354	1/ 1	13,392
Workers			2,890	6/ 4	2,890

- * Right-wing includes AIP and AP. The AIP received 51 percent of the Presidential vote and 54 percent of the candidate total. Left-wing includes P&F, PP, HR, LU, and LRU votes. McCarthy received 756,731 votes, Ernest Miller of the Restoration Party garnered 361, Frank Taylor of the United American Party polled 36, and None of the Above received 5108.

The 1978 Election

The Libertarian Party finally replaced the right-wing groups as America's third-largest party in 1978. Paced by Clark's 377,960 votes in California, the LP's thirty-nine candidates increased the party's totals by 187,000 votes over 1976. The LP also elected a state legislator in Alaska under the Libertarian label thereby becoming the only minor party with a partisan elected official. (Two others, James Buckley in New York and American party State

Senator in Tennessee were defeated in re-election bids in previous elections.) The LP is also unique in that it maintains organizations in all fifty states—something no other minor party has been able to do.

The AIP and AP encountered more turmoil in 1978 as several AIP state organizations seceded and formed the National Conservative Party under John Couture. Basically, this group consisted of the parties that had formed the American Independence party in 1976. William Dyke, the AIP's 1976 Vice-Presidential nominee, also left the group in order to form the National Organization of State Conservative Parties which was intended to be another national conservative party. The NCP moved far to the right as it flirted with Louisiana Ku Klux Klan leader David Dukes and ex-Minuteman chief Bob DePugh. Dyke's group appointed a few state chairmen but it was unable to field a single candidate in 1978. Finally, the AP underwent internal bloodshed which resulted in the removal of Thomas Anderson as chairman. The net effect of this chaos was the presence of only forty-eight candidates in 1978 and the reduction of their 1976 vote by one-half.

The other minor parties also suffered declines. Only the Prohibition and Workers Party increased their totals over those of 1976 while the SWP enlarged in major candidate totals. The People's Party continued its decline as its state organizations simply vanished. Its Michigan affiliate, the Human Rights party, left the PP and merged with the Socialist Party. In all, 282 independent and third-party candidates received about 3.2 million votes out of 133 million (2.3%) cast for major candidates. None were successful. Overall totals for 1978 are listed on Table 6.

TABLE 6
1978 Election Results*

Party or Grouping	Votes for Major Candidates	# Candidates/# States
Libertarian	542,809	39/18
Right-wing	423,688	48/17
Socialist Worker	164,767	28/15
Left-wing	159,276	13/ 3
U.S. Labor	84,933	19/11
Prohibition	70,055	9/ 4
Socialist Labor	34,953	6/ 4
Communist	20,661	3/ 3
Workers	6,600	2/ 2
Socialist	2,913	2/ 1

* Right-wing includes AIP, AP, NCP, and CP-Kansas. Vote distribution among these is AIP—152,036; AP—203,225; NCP—45,930; CPK—22,497. Left-wing includes P&F, LU, and LRU. Without Clark's votes in California, the LP would have finished second among the parties.

Conclusion

For the most part, the minor parties are continuing their respective courses as 1980 approaches. The most significant development to date has been the merger of the AIP with the NCP and the NOSCP. As in 1972, the American Party will probably follow suit and the archconservatives will sally forth under one banner. With a "name" candidate, such as former New Hampshire Governor Meldrim Thompson, the AIP could halt its recent decline and have a shot at regaining its national third-place status. Even without a well-known candidate, the AIP may still contest the election with its first unified organization since 1972.

On the Left, the People's Party suffered more defections when the Liberty Union Party of Vermont and the District of Columbia Statehood Party joined the Socialist Party. The SP is courting the Peace and Freedom Party of California whose exit from the PP would effectively finish the latter as a national organization. The newly formed Citizens Party should co-opt whatever support the People's Party has left. Many normally-Democratic Party liberals could find this group an attractive alternative to Jimmy Carter.

The other minor parties show no signs of increasing their strength since the last election. The Prohibition (lately re-christened the National Statesman Party), Socialist Labor, Communist, and Workers Parties have not run a significant number of candidates in the last decade and their Presidential nominees have polled minuscule totals in the last three elections. The Socialist Worker and the U.S. Labor Party have money, volunteers, and intensive recruitment drives, but the splintered Communist/Socialist Left will keep those votes divided among several candidates. It is doubtful that any of these groups can make a significant impact in the near future.

In short, only the Libertarians possess a national organization and a recent political history that will enable them to enter 1980 with a minimum number of structural problems. However, the right-wing mergers and the new Citizens Party have created entities with the possibility of dethroning the LP. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the major parties are still polling around ninety-eight percent of the vote, and the rest is divided among several parties and independents. Of these votes, the LP at best has received only sixteen percent in any election. Still, each year some two or three million votes go to candidates outside of the major parties. The LP is in the best position to capitalize on this pool of discontent. If all of the minor parties have a long way to go before making a major impact on the political system, the LP probably has the shortest path to travel.

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As a general rule, the lack of interest in third-party and independent campaigns is often reflected in the final vote returns. Quite frequently, minor party candidates are recorded as independents and write-in totals are ignored. Totals used in this exercise are fairly complete but there are probably votes for minor party challengers which never made the official records. Third-party candidates competing as independents have been identified if at all possible. The minor parties themselves keep few records on their campaigns and those they have are usually inaccurate or incomplete.

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