

by  
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# TAKING POLITICS SERIOUSLY

**I**n recent fundraising efforts and direct mail promotions by several libertarian groups there has appeared the following statement by Alan Baron, the Washington editor of *Politics Today*: "Various recent surveys have indicated that, if any trend in opinion is evident, it's toward libertarianism — the philosophy that argues against government intervention and for personal rights." Interesting thought. Now, Alan Baron is not a libertarian, but a former campaign manager for George McGovern, and a highly respected observer of the national political scene.

Why has Mr. Baron put the label "libertarian" on the trends he perceives in our society? For the very same reason that hundreds of thousands of Americans have become aware of a libertarian alternative to conservatism and liberalism: the Libertarian Party. For all the criticisms of the LP, for all its amateurism and absurd reluctance to recognize its startling potential, the Libertarian Party has nonetheless unquestionably been responsible for turning more people on to libertarianism than all of the other elements of the movement *combined*.

This doesn't mean other libertarian organizations and causes are not important. Far from it. Scholarly work, direct lobbying, ad hoc alliances, special interest groups, all are essential if we are ever to achieve the libertarian goal of a free society. The point is that within this multi-faceted movement it is the role of the Libertarian Party to promote and publicize the philosophy.

The LP is the *only* grassroots organization that has as its

chief concern the dissemination of the entire libertarian program to a popular audience. Its job is not one of theorizing; nor is it to concentrate its resources on promoting one particular libertarian issue. Its purpose is to enlist more individuals in the libertarian movement and thereby facilitate the dismantling of the coercive state apparatus.

Thus far the LP has been remarkably successful in fulfilling this role. The party has received significant national publicity and respectful, objective coverage and commentary from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other important news outlets far too numerous to mention. There can be no denying that because of the LP the public perception of the libertarian alternative is infinitely greater than would have been the case without the party.

This is an extremely important point. There *must* be a central force behind the movement for a libertarian society. That force must grow and gather momentum — all the while spinning off subsidiary groups and movements which in turn draw others closer to the attraction of the main, fully integrated movement. Only a thorough understanding of the importance of individual freedom, the interdisciplinary nature of libertarianism and the interdependence of all activities designed to reduce state power will motivate a person to become actively involved. The Libertarian Party is the vehicle that transmits — or precipitates — this understanding for most people.

Thus, working within the Republican or Democratic

Parties is a hopelessly futile venture. A recent study by the Brookings institution demonstrated rather conclusively that the growth of government varies not one iota between Republican and Democratic administrations. Major party politics today is simply a grotesque competition to see who can gain the most control over free men and women.

Only an uncompromisingly consistent libertarian movement can hope to reverse this ceaseless ratcheting upwards of government power — which makes the job of maximizing the effectiveness of the Libertarian Party all the more important. What can be done?

Our immediate objective must be to become a major alternative to the Republicans and Democrats. The point has been made before that political action by libertarians takes advantage of unparalleled opportunities for publicity, as well as of the chance to actually begin dismantling government from within. Neither of these opportunities can be realized if the LP remains a minor party.

The publicity will continue to be generated as long as the party continues to grow. The novelty of the LP is a thing of the past as far as the media is concerned. We must, therefore, demonstrate to the world that we are prepared to move forward with a professional, plausible plan to become a major political alternative.

Alan Baron is correct when he sees a trend toward libertarianism in America. True, most Americans would not yet go as far as we would on most issues, but that is the way it should be. *The Libertarian Party already is in the lead on every important issue in the country and the trend is in our direction! We are in a position*

to point the direction for political change because we are *ahead* of the people, while the Republicans and Democrats are *behind* them.

Take, for example, the tax issue. Interviews with national leaders of both major parties on the growing national tax revolt provided splendid comic relief on the evening news. Here were our “leaders” awkwardly contorting into 180° turns in an attempt to catch up to the strongest political movement in the United States since the 1960s’ antiwar demonstrations. As with the Vietnam War, the politicians have no real idea of what the people are upset about.

And while libertarians were a *part* of the antiwar movement, they are in the *lead* of the antitax movement. (See the July 1978 issue of *LR* for a good analysis of the role played by the Libertarian Party in the Prop. 13 victory.)

In foreign policy, too, both major parties are totally out of step with the majority of Americans. What are we to make of the leader of the Democratic Party, Jimmy Carter, dusting off the Cold War and trying to out-hawk the Republican right wing? But the important thing about

Carter’s attempt to involve the United States in the tribal affairs of Africa, to “get tough” and resurrect the Cold War, is that *the American people aren’t listening to him*. His cries of “wolf” are falling on deaf ears. Here, as elsewhere, the people, if given a choice, will come closer to the libertarian viewpoint — in this case, nonintervention — than to the position of the Establishment parties.

As a final example, I would point to the increasingly tolerant attitude of *most* Americans toward the lifestyles of others. To be sure, there is a long way to go; but the vicious call to legislate the personal behavior of others is more often than not looked upon with bemusement by the voters. The mindless, reactionary hatred of the New Right is clearly out of touch with the mood of the nation.

The Libertarian Party is in the forefront of every important political trend in the nation. Candidates and party leaders must start acting in a manner befitting this role. There is no need to be apologetic about being — temporarily — a minor party. We can demonstrate that we are the wave of the future, but we can do so only if we take politics seriously. *And that means learning the issues.*

Clearly, libertarian principles must underline every public position LP candidates take. But those principles must be applied to actual political situations. LP candidates must enter into a dialogue that in large part will be determined by what the major party candidates are saying. I can remember my frustration in 1976 when LP presidential candidate Roger MacBride held news conferences and limited his remarks to a general (albeit eloquent) discussion of his “tripod” of issues: a noninterventionist foreign policy, a strict respect for civil liberties, and a free market economy. Fine, the reporters would say, but what about President Ford’s statement on Eastern Europe? Or about Carter’s call for a five percent cut in defense spending? MacBride, who clearly is capable of better, would often respond as though the reporter was insulting him by bringing up such crass things as *issues*.

Encouragingly, there appears to be a distinct trend toward LP candidates taking a more realistic attitude about campaigning. This year there are several excellent candidates for public office who are doing their homework. One need only hear California LP gubernatorial candidate Ed Clark at a news conference or on a

# TOWARD THE SECOND AMERICAN REVOLUTION

LIBERTARIAN  
STRATEGIES  
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**We are in a position to point the direction for political change because we are ahead of the people, while both the GOP and the Democrats are behind them.**

by Leonard Liggio

# THE DISENCHANTED ELECTORATE: CAPTURING THE INDEPENDENT VOTER

**E**ver since the 1940 election, the attitudes of the American voter have been recorded by scholars of voting behavior such as those at The Survey Research Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan, and the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago. The most recent work based on these collections to date is *The Changing American Voter*, by Norman Nie (Chicago), Sidney Verba (Harvard) and John Petrocik (UCLA), sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund and published by Harvard.

This study depicts the citizenry as changing its political outlook because of its dissatisfaction and great alienation from both of the two major political parties, as well as from the political process itself. Thus a major realignment, comparable to that which occurred during the New Deal, is now taking place among American voters — a realignment that will have a fundamental impact on the future of American politics. Libertarians would do well to study it.

In the past, it was not possible to predict a person's stand on one issue from his stand on another issue — there was little consistency in voter attitudes on issues, if you went by the categories established by political scientists. Consistency existed only with reference to political *affiliations*. Although one could not predict a person's stand on issues from the stand of his or her parents, the political commitment which *was* transmitted from generation to generation was party *affiliation*. The parties' existence had become a permanent fixture, although their positions on issues changed. The alignment of certain social groups with a

particular party will often continue over generations, and the party will change its emphasis as the preferences and problems of its "inherited" constituencies change. Thus, party identification has been a powerful tool for predicting voting behavior, while the voter's identification with liberal or conservative concepts is a weak source of voter prediction. In the past, the voter's identification with particular social or cultural groups determined party affiliation and thus voting behavior.

Thus, although 45 percent of residents may answer that the government wastes a lot of taxes, or 24 percent hardly ever trust the government to do what is right, these voters will not align with one party on the basis of these attitudes, but rather will spread their votes between the parties. Similarly, the fact that the number who believe that the government does not care what people "like me" think has increased from 27 percent (1956) to 56 percent (1973) is not translated into alignment with a particular party. Rather, it has led to a major shift *away* from the Republican and Democratic parties and toward independence. While weak partisanship has remained constant over a quarter century, at about 40 percent, strong partisanship has declined from almost 40 percent to about 25 percent, while independence has increased from less than a quarter to 40 percent. Very significant in this process is the fact that since 1964 the proportion of independents among *new* voters has jumped to 50 percent or more. Over time, independence from the two major parties will increase dramatically as new voters appear each year. Young voters with Democratic or Repub-