

Progressive Party (United States, 1948)

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The **United States Progressive Party of 1948** was a left-wing political party that ran former Vice President Henry A.

Wallace of Iowa for president and U.S. Senator Glen H. Taylor of Idaho for vice president in 1948.

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Progressive Party

Founded	1948
Dissolved	1955
Preceded by	Progressive Party
Ideology	Progressivism, pacifism, social democracy, democratic socialism
Political position	Left-wing

Politics of the United States

Political parties

Elections

Foundation

The formation of the Progressive Party began in 1946, when the recently ex- Secretary of Commerce and former Vice President Henry A. Wallace began to publicly agitate against the policies of the Truman administration. Calls for a third party had been growing even before Wallace left the Truman Administration, with two major organizations, the National Citizens Political Action Committee (NCPAC) and the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions (ICCASP; both of these organizations were formed as PACs for Roosevelt).^[1] While these two organizations would eventually form the backbone of the 1948 Progressive Party and Henry Wallace's bid for President, it took several years for these organizations to agree on a shared platform and move forward with the formation of a political party. This happened in July 1948, when a convention was called in Philadelphia to launch the "New Party" to a crowd of enthusiastic liberal and left-leaning citizens.^[2]

Endorsement

The Communist Party USA did not field a presidential candidate, and instead endorsed Wallace for President; given that the Cold War was beginning to gain momentum and with it the Red Scare and anti-Communist sentiment, this endorsement was to hinder Wallace far more than it would help him. Wallace had served Franklin D. Roosevelt as Secretary of Agriculture, Vice President, and Secretary of Commerce. He was fired by President Harry S. Truman because he denounced Truman's foreign policy regarding the Cold War. When Wallace refused to expel Communists working in the party during the 1948 election, his campaign was severely criticized by both

the rigidly anti-Communist Truman and Dewey camps.

Running as peace candidates in the nascent Cold War era, the Wallace-Taylor ticket garnered no electoral votes and only 2.4 percent of the popular vote, far less than most pundits had anticipated; some historians have suggested that the Progressive campaign did Truman more good than harm, as their strident criticism of his foreign policy helped to undercut Republican claims that the administration's policies were insufficiently anti-Communist. Nearly half of these votes were obtained in New York State (tipping the state and its 47 electoral votes from Truman to Dewey), where Wallace ran on the American Labor Party ballot line.

On September 11, 1948, for instance, the national committee of the Progressive Party passed a resolution which observed:

The totally unjustified decisions of the Illinois Electoral Board to rule the Progressive Party off the ballot is a clear violation of the most basic democratic concepts.

The decisions rob millions of the free citizens of Illinois of their right to vote for the Party and candidate of their choice. They force the war policies of the old parties down the throats of freedom and peace-loving Americans.

Free Americans cannot—and will not—tolerate stolen elections.

This reflects a growing move by states to limit ballot access by any candidate other than the Republican or Democratic party candidates.

Views

"I urge elimination of groups and factions in this new party movement. This movement is as broad as humanity itself. I urge that we accept all people who wish for a peaceful understanding between the United States and Soviet Russia We can get the support of these people if they realize that we do not represent one group. If we are going to be a party of 20 million, there are going to be many kinds of people in that party. Keep the door open".^[3] –Henry A. Wallace, from a speech given in April 1948

The slogan of the "New Party", and the name many used to refer to the party forming around Henry Wallace, was appropriately "Fight for Peace". A major drive for Henry Wallace had always been the ending of the hostile relations between the Soviet Union and the United States and the acceptance of Russian influence in Europe.^[4] These sentiments were first put forward by Wallace in 1944, but those same sentiments soon began to take a more dramatic tone, as a sense of urgency and anxiety for peace settled in with the beginning of the arms race and the Cold War. Yet, while the "New Party" may be most famous for its anti-war, pro-Russian relations, it sought to include an incredibly broad range of issues and interests. The quote by Henry Wallace above shows how he, and many others in the party, sought to create something more than a single-issue party, to the objection of other leaders in the party who felt that would be their undoing.^[5] Nevertheless, the platform of the party and the range of issues it covered show the diversity of the people who formed the "New Party" in 1948, which included many socialists as well as communists. Among the policies the Progressive Party hoped to implement were the end of all Jim Crow laws/segregation in the South, the advancement of women's rights, the continuation of many New Deal policies including national health insurance and unemployment benefits, the expansion of the welfare system, and the nationalization of the energy industry among others.^[6]

The party at state level

In Massachusetts, the anti-war Progressive Party was active in 1948 and faced discrimination in this state also. On May 31, 1948, for instance, the Democratic Mayor of Boston, James Curley, undemocratically denied the use of the bandstand on the Boston Common to the Progressive Party of Massachusetts. The following month, however, on June 29, one of the African-American leaders of the Progressive Party, Paul Robeson, was allowed to speak in the Crystal Ballroom in Boston's Hotel Bradford.

In Virginia, in 1948, Virginia Foster Durr ran for the U.S. Senate seat on the Progressive ticket.

Pop culture connection

One of the Kingston Trio's most popular folk songs in the 1950s, "The MTA Song", was written by supporters of the Progressive Party of Massachusetts' 1949 Boston mayoralty candidate, Walter A. O'Brien. After Boston's publicly funded MTA purchased the privately owned Boston Elevated Railway's subway and trolley system for \$30 per share more than each share was worth, the MTA imposed a fare increase on the citizens of Boston. Progressive Party mayoral candidate O'Brien then led unusually large protests against the MTA fare increase before the 1949 mayoral election. But although his campaign's anti-fare increase song was subsequently turned into a national hit record in the 1950s, O'Brien failed to win the local Boston election in 1949. When the Kingston Trio decided to record "The MTA Song", it was apparently agreed to change the first name of the O'Brien referred to in the song from "Walter" to "George", because it was feared that a hit record which referred to "Walter O'Brien" would make it even more difficult than it already was for the former Progressive Party candidate to find a New England employer who was willing to hire him during the McCarthy Era.

Communist influence

Historians have disputed the degree to which Communists shaped the party. Most agree that Wallace himself was not a Communist, but they also agree that he paid very little attention to internal party affairs. Historians Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier argue (1970 p 181):

[The Progressive Party] stood for one thing and Wallace another. Actually the party organization was controlled from the outset by those representing the radical left and not liberalism per se. This made it extremely easy for Communists and fellow travelers to infiltrate into important positions within the party machinery. Once this happened, party stands began to resemble a party line. Campaign literature, speech materials, and campaign slogans sounded strangely like echoes of what Moscow wanted to hear. As if wearing moral blinkers, Wallace increasingly became an imperceptible ideologue. Words were uttered by Wallace that did not sound like him, and his performance took on a strange Jekyll and Hyde quality—one moment he was a peace protagonist and the next a propaganda parrot for the Kremlin.

One historian (further to the left than the Schapsmeiers) explores the internal dynamic (Schmidt 258-9):

- At one pole were the extreme leftists, three closely related groups—admitted Communists, past and present; the party-liners and fellow travelers who failed to differ noticeably with the Communists as to either policy or principle; and finally those non-Communists who, in ... 1944-50 failed to take issue with the Communists on policy, but whose underlying principles seemingly differed....
- In the middle were grouped an apparently large majority of Progressive Party followers—the moderates. Exemplified by both national candidates, these individuals were willing to accept

Communist support, because they felt that it was inconsistent, in the light of their ideals, to oppose Redbaiting by others, yet attempt to read Communists out of the new party.

- At the right were arrayed those who, feeling that Communist support should have been disavowed in no uncertain terms, yet were unwilling to adopt the ADA tactic of violent attack on the Communists. This group would have approved making the Progressives “non-Communist” rather than “antiCommunist”, excluding but not assailing the Reds. Most persons sharing this view had, like Max Lerner, completely avoided the party, but others like Rexford Guy Tugwell joined and stayed, if reluctantly, through the campaign....
- In the period following 1948, party members were hounded by the House Unamerican Activities Committee, from job to job. Members found themselves fired from even the lowest of day labor jobs by FBI agents and others. Although historians point out that groups tended to leave the party in the order of their views from right to left, with most of the rightists departing during or shortly after the campaign, accompanied by many of the moderates. And the moderate defection, so marked following election day, 1948, becoming a nearly complete walkout in the summer of 1950, with the policy rift over Korea and Wallace's departure. Consequently, by the close of 1951 the few remaining portions of the Wallace Progressive Party were composed almost exclusively of the earlier extreme left group. These were the ones who had favored a “narrow” organization; after the Wallace break, they finally achieved this goal, with the departure of almost everyone else, this does not take into account the huge pressure to conform and stop the activism by HUAC and FBI. The fact that the member of congress defeated by Joe McCarthy was Robert La Follette Jr, as an irony not lost on these activists.

Disbandment

In 1952, the Progressive Party ran lawyer Vincent Hallinan for president. Their vice presidential candidate was Charlotta Bass, the first African-American woman ever to run for national office. The campaign attracted little media attention and few votes, and was not even on the ballot in many states. Erstwhile Progressive candidate Henry A. Wallace, who had resigned from the Progressive Party in 1950 over its opposition to the Korean War and had supported Dwight D. Eisenhower, published an article in the September 7, 1952, issue of *This Week* magazine (a Sunday supplement that was included in 37 American newspapers) entitled "Where I Was Wrong," detailing some of his mistakes in not having opposed Stalin strenuously enough. The Progressive Party disbanded in 1955, as the Cold War dominated the political spectrum, and any party which had not taken an anti-Communist position was deemed to be unviable.

The 1948 Progressive Party is but tenuously connected to the original Progressive Party (1912-1932) (although Henry A. Wallace's father had been a fervent Bull Mooser, and Wallace himself had only officially left the Republican party in 1936); members of the 1948 Progressive Party, however, have joined the later state Progressive Parties, thus linking the 1948 group to the Vermont Progressive Party, the Wisconsin Prodanes, and the Progressive Party of Washington.

See also

- Progressive Party (United States, 1912)
- Progressive Party (United States, 1924)
- Jencks v. United States

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Eyewitness accounts of Lyle Mercer, early Progressive Party activist, and founder of the Young Progressives on the University of Washington campus in 1948, and Bobby Mercer, his activist wife.

Archives

- George E. Rennar Papers. (http://digital.lib.washington.edu/findingaids/view?docId=RennarGeorge0636_1656.xml) 1933-1972. 37.43 cubic feet. At the Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections. (<http://lib.washington.edu/specialcollections/laws>) Contains materials about the Progressive Party organization in 1948.

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| Communist Party USA mass organizations

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