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The Virginia Conservative Party, 1965-1969

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THE VIRGINIA CONSERVATIVE PARTY,
1965-1969

by

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B.A. December 1993, Plymouth State College

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
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HISTORY

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This study examines the Virginia Conservative Party of the 1960's. The party was founded in 1965 as a protest against the increasing liberalism in Virginia and national politics. Dedicated to providing voters an alternative to the two major parties, the Conservative Party participated in every major state election from 1965 to 1969. Although failing to win any statewide election, the Conservatives played a significant role in Virginia politics during the 1960's. Paradoxically, the Virginia Conservative Party contributed to the demise of the conservative Democratic Byrd Organization by refusing to support conservative Democrats. Subsequent internal disputes over the party's action in the 1966 Democratic primaries and 1968 presidential election brought about its demise. This thesis uses personal papers, interviews with former members of the Conservative Party and other prominent Virginia politicians, and newspapers to reconstruct the history of the Virginia Conservative Party.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOUTHERN POLITICS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>VIRGINIA'S MASSIVE RESISTANCE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>THE 1964 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>THE FORMATION OF THE VIRGINIA CONSERVATIVE PARTY</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>THE 1965 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>THE ELECTIONS OF 1966</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII.</td>
<td>1967-1968</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX.</td>
<td>THE 1969 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X.</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WORKS CITED.................................................................................146

WORKS CONSULTED.........................................................................150

VITA..............................................................................................152
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Frustrated with what they perceived as the coming of big government, the civil rights movement, and the increasing liberalism in both national and state politics, a group of Virginians assembled at the Hotel John Marshall on July 10, 1965 to nominate a ticket for the gubernatorial election in November.¹ Sincerely believing that a third party was the only means possible to awaken the people about the direction in which the country was heading, they created the Virginia Conservative Party. They feared that the United States was moving toward a communist police state where the federal government’s rule was supreme, and where the cherished freedoms once protected by the Constitution no longer existed. They were frustrated with the politicians they had once supported for supposedly sacrificing conservative government and Virginia’s sovereignty for the sake of winning votes and gaining office. To remedy these disturbing trends, conservative Virginians united to form a third party, running candidates in nearly every major election until the party’s demise in 1969. Throughout the party’s four year existence, it always advocated strongly a conservative, and at times a reactionary, agenda. These beliefs and characteristics of the Virginia Conservative Party raise some interesting questions.

Why did some conservative Virginians feel the need to organize a third party given the staunch conservatism of Virginia’s dominant Democratic party and its leader


The style manual used for this thesis is Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Sixth Edition.
Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., and what did they intend to accomplish by this action? The Byrd faction, usually referred to as the Byrd Organization, had controlled Virginia politics since the 1920's. By 1965, however, the Byrd faction’s dominance was in jeopardy, as a different philosophy of government, shaped in part by the civil rights movement, urbanization and federal activism, penetrated Virginia. Since the Virginia Conservative Party emerged around the same time the Byrd Organization was in decline, was the party a contributor to or a product of the Byrd Organization’s demise? If the party did contribute to the Organization’s demise, how large was that contribution? If the party was a product of the Organization’s demise, what factors led to the demise of this political machine? Will the answer reveal the reasons behind the formation of the Virginia Conservative Party? Historians have touched upon these questions in previous studies, but have never thoroughly studied the Virginia Conservative Party’s impact on Virginia politics during the 1960's or examined whether the party accomplished what its leaders intended. Such scholars as J. Harvie Wilkinson III, Frank B. Atkinson, and Andrew Buni concur on the reasons for the party’s existence, but their analyses do not go beyond events relating to the 1964 presidential election.

According to J. Harvie Wilkinson III, in his study of the Byrd Organization’s decline, the Virginia Conservative Party was “founded . . . on the premise that Democrats, Republicans, and the Byrd organization were all swerving too far to the left.”2 When Mills E. Godwin, Jr., “tainted” the Byrd organization by an “unholy” alliance with President Johnson, the labor unions, and black voter groups, the Conservatives felt

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betrayed and formed a third party. Frank Atkinson, in his study of Virginia’s Republican Party after World War II, contended that the Conservative Party was “principally . . . a reaction to Godwin and his embrace of President Johnson, whose civil rights policies were anathema to Southside conservatives.” Andrew Buni, in his study The Negro in Virginia Politics, argued that the Conservative Party “organized in protest against the liberalization of the Democrats” and Godwin’s supposed alliance with Johnson and his Great Society. These historians are correct in arguing that Godwin and his actions during the 1964 presidential election had much to do with the formation of the Virginia Conservative Party. However, was this the principal reason or more a culmination of the events of the last decade? Furthermore, although these historians examine the party’s impact on the 1965 gubernatorial election and the 1966 Democratic senatorial primary and general elections, they do not explain the reasons behind many of its actions.

The analysts examined why the Conservatives disliked Godwin and the Democratic Party in 1965, but they did not explain the Conservatives’ disdain for the Republican Party and its candidate, Linwood Holton. Why did Conservatives find Holton and the Republican Party unacceptable? The once solidly Democratic South was beginning its realignment to the conservative wing of the Republican Party, but that process seemed to be stalled in Virginia. What happened that persuaded some Virginia conservatives that a third party was their only hope?

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3Ibid., 271-272.


In 1966, the Virginia Conservative Party told its supporters to refrain from voting in the Democratic primary and nominated its own candidates for the United States Senate and the Fourth District seat in the House of Representatives. Wilkinson and Atkinson concluded that these actions represented a fatal blow to the Byrd Organization. Wilkinson wrote that the Conservative Party’s declaration “undoubtedly caused [U.S. Senator A. Willis] Robertson’s defeat and probably [Congressman Howard W.] Smith’s defeat” and gave Senator Harry F. Byrd Jr. “the scare of his life.” Atkinson argued that the Byrd Organization “could have withstood the assault and re-nominated both Byrd and Robertson . . . if not for the defection of Southside conservatives.” The Conservative party, however, had “dealt their soul mates a fatal blow.” But, why?

Neither Wilkinson nor Atkinson explained why these Virginia conservatives deserted politicians whom they had supported in the past and who had not openly supported President Johnson as had Godwin. Wilkinson argued that the Party, “through some reasoning process which many bravely sought to unravel, decided that both Byrd and Robertson had succumbed to liberal dogma and were in imminent danger of surrendering to the Great Society.” Atkinson remarked that “[b]y what logic Byrd and Robertson were too ‘liberal’ remains a mystery.”

There is a simple explanation behind Wilkinson, Atkinson, and Buni’s inability to

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6In late 1965, Harry F. Byrd, Jr., was appointed by Governor Albertis Harrison to replace the senior Byrd upon his retirement.


8Ibid., 167.


answer the questions raised by the Virginia Conservative Party. Their studies focused on other questions relating to Virginia politics, such as the demise of the Byrd Organization, the rise of Virginia’s Republican party after World War II, and the role of African-Americans in Virginia politics from 1900 to 1965. By thoroughly analyzing the Virginia Conservative Party, this study will fill a gap in the historiography of Virginia politics.

This study will unravel the supposed “mystery” behind many of the Virginia Conservative Party’s actions and examine the party throughout its entire existence, including the party’s participation in the 1968 presidential election, the 1969 gubernatorial election and its protest against the proposed changes to the state constitution. The Virginia Conservative Party was a reaction in one state to the political and social change occurring throughout the South in the decades following World War II. This study will first address how the social and political context of post-World War II Virginia and the nation related to the party’s emergence.
CHAPTER II
THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOUTHERN POLITICS

From the 1920's to the mid-1960's, the Byrd Organization, the conservative faction of the state Democratic party under the leadership of Harry F. Byrd, Sr., dominated Virginia politics. Harry Byrd's political philosophy reflected Virginia's conservative ideals of limited government, low taxes, white supremacy, and state rights. He was a product of Virginia's "conservative political heritage, a white male-dominated aristocracy that ruled its domain with a selfish but paternalistic hand."\(^1\) He matured in a Virginia that still talked of "black rule" during Reconstruction and the difficulty in repaying the huge state debt. Byrd was "not a virulent racist but was convinced of the desirability of maintaining racial segregation."\(^2\) His early experience managing the family newspaper and his awareness of the state debt issue convinced Byrd of the necessity of avoiding debt.\(^3\) He emerged as a powerful force in the Commonwealth during the 1920's, becoming the state Democratic party chairman and leading a successful fight against proposed state highway bonds, a campaign which identified the Organization with the pay-as-you-go spending policy. During his term as governor from 1926 to 1930, Byrd completely reorganized the state government and gave the executive greater power. He also made the courthouse officials more dependent on Richmond for their salaries by his


\(^3\)Ibid., 603; Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia*, 329.
support for the powerful State Compensation Board, established during the gubernatorial term of his successor, John G. Pollard, who served from 1930 to 1934. These reforms assured "that [Byrd’s] political philosophy and leadership would extend far beyond his term in office."4

In 1949, Virginia could lay claim "to the most thorough control by an oligarchy," according to political scientist V.O. Key, Jr.5 This "oligarchy," better known as the Byrd Organization, demonstrated "a sense of honor, an aversion to open venality, a degree of sensitivity to public opinion, a concern for efficiency in administration, and, so long as it doesn’t cost much, a feeling of social responsibility."6 The Organization owed its success to several factors: a restricted electorate, dominance of the state legislature, and the powers of the circuit court judge, county officials, and the State Compensation Board. The restricted electorate was a result of the suffrage clauses in the 1902 state constitution, which effectively disfranchised blacks and poor whites, two elements of the electorate that generally voted against Organization candidates. The State Compensation Board, under the direction of Everett "Ebbie" R. Combs, Byrd’s right hand man, maintained loyalty among local elected officials by fixing the salaries and expense allowances of a county’s five constitutional officers: commonwealth’s attorney, treasurer, commissioner of the revenue, clerk of circuit court, and sheriff. The county courthouse has gone down


6Ibid.
"in history as the symbol of Byrd’s political rule in the Old Dominion." Nowhere were the courthouse cliques more devoted than in Virginia’s rural Southside, the area that not only contained the most blacks, but the most vehement conservatives. Moreover, the means by which the state selected circuit court judges enabled the Organization to maintain control in areas of the Commonwealth in which it was weakest, i.e., urban areas and counties with Republican or anti-Byrd majorities. The General Assembly elected these judges and the Organization always dominated the state legislature. The circuit court judge possessed important appointive powers: the electoral board; the school trustee electoral board, which generally appointed the school board; and the local board of public welfare. By the end of the 1940's, however, significant changes were occurring in Virginia, resulting in serious challenges to the Byrd Organization’s control. The central themes of this change were African-American challenges to white supremacy, the emergence of African-Americans from political object to political participant, the decline of the Democratic party’s dominance, and the rise of the Republican Party. These changes were not only affecting Virginia, but the South as a whole.

Since the end of Reconstruction, Southern politics had been characterized by a one-party political system in which the Democratic Party reigned supreme. According to V.O. Key, Jr., in his classic study of southern politics, the advent of a one-party political

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8Key, Southern Politics, 22.

system resulted from unity on the race issue. The backbone of this political solidarity was the black belt, regions in the various states which contained the largest percentage of African-Americans.10 Whites residing in the black belt imposed their will on their respective states and "presented a solid regional front in national politics on the race issue."11 Key argued that southern unity on the race issue hindered the rise of a genuine two-party political system because "[t]wo-party competition would have been fatal to the status of black-belt whites."12 Therefore, a one-party political system evolved in the South with factions of the Democratic party "the equivalent of political parties elsewhere."13 The effects of urbanization and the civil rights movement in the decades following World War II, however, would bring significant change to Southern politics, resulting in its transformation from one-party political domination to genuine two-party political competition.

Throughout the South, rural areas had possessed "disproportionate representation" as a result of "malapportioned state legislative and congressional districts."14 After World War II, the South experienced unprecedented urban growth. New residents were unfamiliar with southern traditions, and less likely to defend white supremacy, segregation and state rights. The South's urban areas became regions that demanded increased support for state services, but found their needs unappreciated in state

10 The black belt regions were also so designated because of the dark, fertile soil conducive for agriculture.
11 Key, Southern Politics, 11.
12 Ibid., 8.
13 Ibid., 16.
legislatures dominated by rural interests. The U.S. Supreme Court sought to remedy the inequitable apportionment by requiring that state legislatures be based on a one person, one vote formula. In Virginia, urbanization created a tenuous situation for the rurally oriented Byrd Organization and its pay-as-you-go spending policy.

Virginia’s urban corridor stretching from Washington D.C. through Richmond to Hampton Roads experienced explosive growth in the late 1940’s and became inundated with people less likely to accept political control by a notoriously parsimonious state government whose power base was in the rural areas. They demanded improved state services and voiced their displeasure at Virginia’s pay-as-you-go spending policy. The Byrd Organization, however, continued to orient its policies toward rural Virginia. Urban problems were not a high priority. Both Republicans and anti-Byrd Democrats “sought to give voice to, and reap the political harvest from, the increasing metropolitan dissension.” In 1949 and again in 1954, the effects of urbanization resulted in challenges to the Byrd Organization’s authority.

In 1949, John Battle, the Organization’s candidate for governor, faced three challengers in the primary, Francis Pickens Miller, Horace Edwards and Remmie Arnold. Miller had become the acknowledged leader of the anti-Byrd faction of the Democratic party at the end of World War II. This faction’s attitude toward government was closer to that of the national Democratic Party than to the Byrd Organization. Miller voiced opposition to the Byrd Organization’s “undemocratic leadership” of Virginia and its

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15}}\text{Ibid., 13. The two key cases were: Baker v. Carr in 1962 which stated that election districts must be equal in population and established the “one person, one vote” dictum; and Reynolds v. Simms in 1964 which stated that state legislatures must be apportioned by population.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}}\text{Atkinson, The Dynamic Dominion, 30.}\]
failure to provide adequate state services. Edwards, a young urban legislator and former state Democratic chairman, had close ties to the Organization, but criticized its handling of urban problems. He appealed for a state sales tax to improve education and an end to pay-as-you-go financing. Edwards’ campaign began well, but was eventually doomed by the Organization’s whispered word that a vote for Edwards was a vote for Miller.\(^\text{17}\)

In a four-way race and with no run-off provision in the primary law, Battle won with only a 42.8 per cent plurality of the vote.\(^\text{18}\) Political analysts have attributed the Organization’s victory to Republicans who entered the primary at the insistence of their leaders.\(^\text{19}\) Believing Miller to be a liberal, they voted for Battle. One anti-Byrd leader declared that “It is a disgusting spectacle when a [Democratic] political leader has to go into the Republican Party to secure votes with which to keep his organization in power.”\(^\text{20}\)

Despite Battle’s victory, the election foreshadowed further problems for the Organization. First, the anti-Byrd faction of the Democratic Party, more in tune with the national party’s philosophy, had mounted a serious challenge to the Organization and its policies. According to Wilkinson, “the organization no longer triumphed with the old finesse; for the first time it had to strain to win.” Second, and perhaps more importantly, “a young, urban figure had seriously questioned the organization’s commitment to expanded public services.”\(^\text{21}\) Edwards’ candidacy revealed how much the Organization ignored its


\(^{18}\)Battle 135,426 or 42.8 per cent; Miller 111,697 or 35.3 per cent; Edwards 47,435 or 15 per cent; Arnold 22,054 or 7.0 per cent.

\(^{19}\)Bass and Devries, *Transformation of Southern Politics*, 345.


\(^{21}\)Ibid., 98.
younger, more progressive members. Therefore, the 1949 Democratic primary not only revealed fissures within the state Democratic party, but also within the Byrd Organization itself.

Another challenge to the Byrd Organization’s authority arose in the 1954 session of the General Assembly. During the legislative session, a group of young urban legislators, called the Young Turks, protested against inadequate state services and the Organization’s failure to respond to the problems brought about by increased urbanization. Criticizing the Organization’s tax and spending policies, they forced the Organization to accept a budget compromise, “in which part of a surplus was appropriated for state services rather than returned as a tax rebate.” This revolt forced a modification of the Byrd Organization’s policies. In subsequent sessions of the General Assembly, the Young Turks were shunned by the Organization’s leadership and given poor committee assignments. Several of them challenged Organization incumbents during 1960’s. During the period from 1949 to 1954, the Organization had made a few grudging concessions to urban areas, notably school construction during Battle’s administration. On the whole, however, it had resisted change, a stance which threatened the Organization’s position in Virginia politics. Although the urban revolution contributed to the changes occurring in Virginia and southern politics, it did not play as significant a role as the ongoing social revolution. The civil rights movement and subsequent federal intervention would forever change the South’s and Virginia’s political landscape.

22Bass and Devries, Transformation of Southern Politics, 345.

23Eisenberg, “The Emergence of Two-Party Politics,” 51.
Returning from fighting a war to preserve democracy, African-American veterans found a society that still considered them second-class citizens. Inspired by wartime rhetoric about democracy many of these veterans were determined to secure their rights. The leaders of the national Democratic Party, notably Harry S Truman, realized the contradiction in tolerating the South’s system of racial discrimination and took steps to provide African-Americans better opportunities. In December 1946, Truman appointed a committee to conduct a “full-scale study of the South’s racial practices.” The President’s Committee on Civil Rights issued a report in October that blamed “segregation for the socioeconomic malaise of southern blacks” and stated that “the federal government should assume the duty of correcting these social evils.” Using the report as a guideline, Truman introduced civil rights legislation in February 1948 that called for Congress to establish a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), abolish the poll tax, pass a national anti-lynching law, and end segregation in interstate transportation. Southern Democrats found these modest civil right proposals anathema to their way of life and believed that the national Democratic Party “no longer represented the South’s interests.”

At the party’s national convention in Philadelphia, southern Democrats were adamantly opposed to the nomination of any candidate on a platform that called for a civil rights plank. They wanted to insert a plank that affirmed the party’s support of states’ rights. When the liberal Democrats succeeded in passing a stronger civil rights plank than Truman’s proposals, the entire Mississippi delegation and half the Alabama delegation


25 Ibid., 234.
delegation walked out of the convention. The other southern delegations refused to back Truman’s nomination and threw their support to Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia. Nevertheless, Truman was nominated; however, some of the disenchanted southern Democrats reconvened in Birmingham to form a States’ Rights Party.

Nicknamed the Dixiecrats, the party nominated Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina for president and Governor Fielding Wright of Mississippi for vice-president. The Dixiecrats ran on a platform that “centered on opposition to civil rights.” They “promised to oppose the police state and executive usurpation and to promote states’ rights and segregation.” Running strongest in the Deep South and in areas heavily populated by blacks, the Dixiecrats won the states of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The third party’s impact on the election, however, was minimal as Truman carried the upper South and scored a stunning upset over his Republican challenger, Thomas Dewey.

In Virginia, Byrd refused to endorse the Truman-Barkley ticket in 1948. This action represented what he later referred to as “golden silence,” by which he refused to endorse his own party’s candidate, and sometimes implicitly supported the Republican candidate for President. Truman carried Virginia, but he would be the last Democratic presidential candidate to do so until 1964. The 1948 presidential election marked a significant turning point in southern politics, representing the end of the “solid South” and the beginning of southern disaffection with the national Democratic Party that would continue to some degree for almost three decades. The election also indicated the extent

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26Ibid., 278-280.

to which some southerners would go to prevent any change in the racial status quo.

During the 1950's, the national Republican Party made significant inroads in the South. Southern Democrats began supporting the Republican nominee on the national level, while continuing to support Democrats on the state and local level. This voting pattern became known as presidential Republicanism. In 1952, Eisenhower carried the southern states of Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, and also fared well in the Deep South.28 In Virginia, Byrd repudiated the Democratic candidate for President, Adlai Stevenson, in 1952 and implicitly supported Eisenhower. Atkinson argued that “voting Republican became increasingly acceptable” in Virginia as a result of “golden silence.”29 “It did not immediately throw open the state’s political door to Republican growth,” he contended, but it turned the key.30 The consequences of “golden silence” and the attractiveness of the Republican candidate for governor in 1953 combined to pose a threat to Byrd Organization rule.

In 1953, Ted Dalton, a young progressive Republican state senator, ran for governor against Thomas Stanley, the Organization candidate. Dalton called for election law reform, poll tax repeal, higher teacher salaries, expanded state services, and industrial development. In the end, however, Dalton advocated one measure too much, a $100 million highway bond issue. This proposal which provoked Byrd’s active involvement in the election ruined Dalton’s election chances. Aided by the senator’s support, Stanley

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28Ibid. Eisenhower captured thirty-five per cent of the vote in Alabama; thirty per cent in Georgia; forty-seven per cent in Louisiana; forty per cent in Mississippi; and forty-nine per cent in South Carolina.

29Atkinson, The Dynamic Dominion, 57.

30Ibid., 60.
defeated Dalton, but by the narrowest margin for an Organization candidate in years. Dalton received 44 per cent of the vote, the most for a Republican candidate in decades.31 "Golden silence" and the impact of urbanization threatened the Byrd Organization's hegemony in Virginia politics in the years following World War II. Urbanization and the social revolution had become agents of change throughout the South, but the latter had not reached its zenith as the events of the late 1950's and 1960's would attest.

The South's reaction to Truman's civil rights proposals paled in comparison to the firestorm set off by the U. S. Supreme Court's decision regarding school desegregation. On May 17, 1954, a day segregationists would come to call "Black Monday," the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional. The decision "began the slow process of formal dismantlement of de jure segregation" and marked the beginning of the Second Reconstruction, an era that witnessed increased federal activism designed to dismantle the traditional political and social system of the South.32 Many southern whites reacted with unmitigated horror toward the decision and mobilized to maintain the racial status quo.

Harry Byrd declared that, "If we can organize the Southern states for massive resistance to this order I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South."33 His statement indicated how the South would meet the crisis. In March 1956, nineteen senators and eighty-two House members from the South signed the Southern Manifesto that condemned the Supreme


32Bass and Devries, Transformation of Southern Politics, 10.

33Wilkinson, Harry Byrd, 113.
Court’s decision and vowed to “resist forced integration by any lawful means.”

Organizations committed to segregation emerged throughout the South in the months following the Supreme Court’s decision. These organizations were generally grass roots movements that received their most solid support from black-belt whites. The most vocal, and perhaps the most powerful, of these groups were the White Citizens’ Councils.

In the years following the decision, state legislatures in the South “enacted some 450 segregationists laws and resolutions . . . approved pupil-placement laws, most authorized closing schools to avoid desegregating them, and all but North Carolina passed or strengthened laws designed to hobble the NAACP.” These politicians and organizations centered their defense of segregation on three propositions: white supremacy, state rights, and anti-communism.

Segregationists argued that African-Americans were biologically and socially inferior to whites and contended that integration would bring miscegenation and a loss of racial distinction, thus threatening white Anglo-Saxon supremacy. Moreover, they asserted that the decision corrupted the Constitution in that it violated the sacred principle of state rights. James Jackson Kilpatrick, the editor of the Richmond News Leader, reintroduced the theory of interposition in a series of editorials relating to integration that did much clothe the South’s opposition to integration in the rhetoric of state rights.

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35 Ibid., 221.


State legislatures throughout the South in the mid-1950's adopted resolutions of interposition, a theory based on the premise that the state had the right to interpose its citizens between any federal law that it believed violated the Constitution. \(^{38}\) Lastly, segregationists believed that integration “was nothing more than a foreign plot, a conspiracy dominated and directed by ‘Communist’ subversives.” \(^{39}\)

Segregationists charged that experts the Supreme Court relied upon to declare segregation unlawful were associated with and had participated in communist activities. Southern congressional leaders, notably Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, demanded an investigation into the communist influences of the civil rights movement and the NAACP. \(^{40}\) Eight southern states established investigative committees to search “for Communists and inevitably found integrationists.” \(^{41}\) These committees “conducted hearings on the causes of racial unrest” and heard testimony from witnesses such as Manning Johnson and J. B. Matthews, former “expert” witnesses for the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). \(^{42}\) Predictably, these committees either concluded that the civil rights movement was an example of communist subversion and

\(^{45}\)

\(^{38}\)See Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance, 126-149.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 185.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., 119-123.

\(^{41}\)Bartley, The New South, 221.

\(^{42}\)Manning Johnson was an African-American who had joined the Communist Party in the 1930's. Shortly thereafter, he became disillusioned with the Communist Party’s activities and wrote an exposé detailing how the Communist Party incited African-Americans for its own benefit. J. B. Matthews was a former investigator for HUAC and “a professional witness,” who once labeled “seven thousand Protestant ministers pro-Communist.” Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance, 187-188.
that the "NAACP was a communist-front organization" or "came very close to doing so."  

Throughout the period of massive resistance and into the civil rights struggles of the 1960's, segregationists repeatedly raised the cry of communism to defend the South's antiquated system of racial discrimination. By doing so, the pro-segregation argument came to be identified with the radical right beginning to emerge in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Segregationists believed that the erosion of state right had reduced "the great and noble nation founded as a 'Republic of Sovereign States'" to a "totalitarian autocracy." While white supremacy remained the focus of segregationist thought, the movement's ideology "expanded to encompass the politico-economic attitudes characteristic of conservatism." Segregationists came to believe that the "ceaseless expansion of a centralized and bureaucratic government, the philosophy of the welfare state and the social gospel, the erosion of states' rights, confiscatory income taxes, and the increasingly collectivized pattern of American life were all manifestations of 'a total, all-out assault against American conservatism.'" By adopting a broader conservative ideology, rather than concentrating on the narrow, and less acceptable, issue of white supremacy, segregationists attempted to galvanize support for their movement outside of the South.

In 1956, segregationists extended these efforts into national politics. These efforts

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43 Ibid.


46 Ibid., 190-191.
did not emanate from the upper levels of political leadership, who either grudgingly supported the Democratic candidates or “turned again to presidential Republicanism.” Rather, “lower-level activists . . . pushed forward a program to revive the fire of political rebellion throughout the South and the nation.” These activists advocated a program that called for political action independent of the two major political parties and throughout 1956, the “independent movement” spawned the formation of “Constitution” and “States Rights” parties in the various southern states. In September, the efforts to establish a “coordinated movement” came to fruition at the National States’ Rights Conference. The conference adopted the name the “National Conservative Movement” and most participants “endorsed” T. Coleman Andrews, Sr., of Virginia, and Thomas H. Werdel of California, respectively, for president and vice-president. In October, the “Independent States’ Rights Party” officially nominated the Andrews-Werdel ticket, and adopted an eight plank platform that advocated states’ rights and a powerful military, and “opposed the income tax, ‘the dangerous trend toward socialism,’ communism, and . . . world government.” Although its supporters displayed “considerable enthusiasm,” the movement failed miserably, failing to win a plurality in any state.

From 1948 to 1956, reaction to the civil rights movement fueled southern politics. In 1948, the Dixiecrats voiced opposition to the national Democratic Party’s support of

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48Ibid., 163-164. Andrews was former director of the Internal Revenue Service under President Eisenhower and became a charter member of the John Birch Society. Werdel was a former Republican congressman from California.

49Ibid., 164. The party was on the ballot in only six states: Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. In Virginia, the party carried Prince Edward County.
civil rights, resulting in the end of the "solid South" and the beginning of southern
disaffection with the national Democratic Party that would endure for almost three
decades. A result of this disaffection was "presidential Republicanism" during the 1950's
and the emergence of the national Republican Party as an acceptable political alternative.
In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional, a major blow to
the South's racial system and the beginning of the federal government's involvement in
curing the nation's social ills. Many southern whites, however, refused to surrender
easily and formulated a plan of a massive resistance designed to block integration. These
efforts included defending segregation with white supremacist, states' rights, and anti-
communist rhetoric, passing laws on the state level to thwart compliance with court-
ordered desegregation edicts, and the establishment of political pressure groups to oppose
the disruption of the racial status quo. In Virginia, the rise and demise of massive
resistance and the political repercussions thereafter laid a foundation for the Virginia
Conservative Party of the 1960's. The party was a manifestation of the protests that
emerged in the aftermath of Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr.'s, surrender of massive
resistance in 1959. Therefore, a detailed examination of Virginia's massive resistance is
necessary to understand fully the reasons behind the formation of the Virginia
Conservative Party.
CHAPTER III

VIRGINIA'S MASSIVE RESISTANCE

The rise and demise of massive resistance contributed greatly to the changes that occurred in Virginia politics during the 1960's, including the collapse of the Byrd Organization, the state Democratic Party’s drift to the ideology of its national counterpart, and the rise of the Virginia Conservative Party. When the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional, however, the immediate result was an affirmation of the Byrd Organization’s dominance in Virginia politics, a dominance that had declined in the years following World War II due to the urban revolution. According to political scientist Ralph Eisenberg, the decision stopped the moderating process at work in Virginia politics... [A]gainst the spectre of integration (‘race-mixing’), antiorganization and moderate organization leaders could do little to rouse a popular following to their progressive causes. The organization moved the ground rules of politics into a racial context with the lines drawn between those for and those against massive resistance, and thus defined the area of political conflict with its opponents. On such an emotional battleground, the organization’s foes could not amass enough support to raise issues apart from the race question. It was as if the entire state had to undergo a catharsis on the issue of race before it could again face the panorama of other political issues.¹

Governor Stanley’s initial call for a calm and careful consideration of the decision before deciding on a response was superseded by the verbal attacks of Southside politicians and Harry Byrd. Legislators from the Southside met in Petersburg to express “their unalterable opposition to the principle of integration of the races in the schools.”² Other

¹Eisenberg, “The Emergence of Two-Party Politics,” 51.

²Wilkinson, Harry Byrd, 123.
Southside conservatives organized a political pressure group, similar to the White Citizens’ Councils emerging elsewhere in the South, named the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. The Defenders worked to prevent integration and the usurpation of state rights.\(^3\) Harry Byrd was reportedly so angered by Stanley’s response that when he heard “the top blew off the U.S. Capitol.”\(^4\) Under pressure, Stanley organized a legislative commission comprised entirely of whites, with the Southside receiving disproportionate representation, to recommend a course of action.

The Gray Commission, named after its chairman, Delegate Garland Gray, a Southside legislator, formulated a plan considered a moderate response to the decision. The Gray Plan, as it became known, reinforced local prerogatives, allowing areas willing to integrate the option of doing so. Moreover, the plan provided for tuition grants for students to attend nonsectarian private schools to avoid attending integrated public schools. This provision required amending the state Constitution and a referendum was held so that the public could decide if a constitutional convention should be called for this purpose. Forces quickly aligned themselves for and against the convention, with the Byrd Organization favoring amending the constitution. Supporters of the constitutional convention won overwhelmingly, but the Gray Plan “suffered a strange stillbirth.”\(^5\) The Organization interpreted the results of the referendum as a “mandate for total resistance to


integration." In August 1956, the General Assembly adopted the Stanley Plan, providing for a policy of "massive resistance" to school integration.

The "massive resistance" legislation established a Pupil Placement Board to which black students' applications to white schools would be referred. The purpose of the board was to maintain segregation. If the black student appealed to the federal courts, and federal judges ordered admission, the governor was authorized to seize and close the school and attempt to reopen it on a segregated basis. If that approach failed, the school could be operated on an integrated basis without state funds, if the locality under court order wished to do so. The failure of the Gray Plan and the eventual adoption of massive resistance was the outcome of various forces working together.

Harry Byrd and his Organization advocated "massive resistance" for both political and social reasons. The political and economic changes occurring during the years since World War II forced them to pay attention to the interests of their most loyal supporters, the rural Southside whites. The Southside was Virginia's most powerful voter bloc and the Organization could ill afford to alienate that region. Therefore, the wishes of the Southside whites were imposed on the entire state. Unlike the cities, blacks and whites lived next door to each other in the rural Southside; therefore, school integration would be most problematic. Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., commented years later that, "There would have been no hard, unyielding core of massive resistance in Virginia if there were no Southside. Virginia as a whole was opposed to racial mixing in the public

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6Ibid.
7Ibid., 45.
8Ibid., 36.
schools, but outside of the Southside the state evinced more of a willingness to face reality.⁹ Furthermore, the Defenders, with chapters throughout the state but still concentrated in the Southside, succeeded in pressing the General Assembly to pass a plan remarkably similar to its proposal, "The Plan for Virginia."¹⁰ The passage of the Stanley Plan set the stage for the 1957 gubernatorial election. The election, pitting Byrd Organization candidate, J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., against Republican Ted Dalton, became a referendum on massive resistance.

The Defenders’ president, Robert Crawford, announced the group’s intention to nominate a candidate for Governor “if any other candidate took a ‘weak’ stand on segregation.”¹¹ Perhaps this is why, despite private misgivings about the legality of massive resistance, Almond stumped throughout Virginia declaring his support of the program and his unalterable opposition to integration. He promised Virginia would never surrender to the federal government and that he would lose his right arm before acquiescing to the unconstitutional decision of the Supreme Court. Dalton, by no means an integrationist himself, supported local option and believed token integration would prevent wholesale integration. According to James Ely, historian of Virginia’s massive resistance period, Dalton’s campaign was doomed after President Eisenhower ordered federal troops into Little Rock, Arkansas in September 1957 to implement court ordered desegregation.¹²

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⁹Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 8 June 1964, B-1.

¹⁰Ely, Crisis of Conservative Virginia, 39.


¹²Ely, Crisis of Conservative Virginia, 67-68.
Almond and the Byrd Organization attacked Dalton and his party affiliation, the party of Eisenhower and his judicial appointee, Chief Justice Earl Warren, the person many southerners considered most responsible for the school desegregation decision in 1954. Capitalizing on the race issue, Almond won overwhelmingly with more than 65 per cent of the vote. Dalton’s 35 per cent was a stark contrast to the share of the vote he garnered only four years earlier. The outcome was a major victory for Senator Byrd because it indicated public support for massive resistance and confirmed the Organization’s control over state affairs. In theory, massive resistance bolstered the Organization’s control and promised a means to halt integration. In practice, however, the results were entirely different.

In September 1958, Almond closed schools in Warren County, Charlottesville, and Norfolk under federal court order to integrate and, in the process, displaced approximately 12,000 students. Private schools were hastily organized, but could not accommodate all the displaced students, especially in the city of Norfolk. Many Virginians desired segregation, but not at the expense of the public schools. Business leaders visited Almond and suggested the school closings were hurting Virginia’s economy and public opinion began to shift away from support of massive resistance. Finally, on January 19, 1959, the federal district court in Norfolk and the Virginia Supreme Court ruled the massive resistance legislation unconstitutional. In one final show of defiance, Almond made a fiery speech declaring, in effect, that Virginia had not yet begun to fight. One week after Almond’s call for renewed defiance, he addressed the General Assembly. The resisters believed the Governor would reiterate his previous call for defiance, but what followed stunned the General Assembly and dismayed the die-hard
segregationists.\textsuperscript{13}

Under intense pressure, Almond announced his intention to end massive resistance. He appointed a committee under moderate state Senator Mosby Perrow of Lynchburg to implement desegregation. The die-hard resisters attempted to reestablish massive resistance, but opponents defeated the proposal in the state Senate, by a vote of 22 to 17.\textsuperscript{14} The Perrow Commission, under Almond’s close scrutiny, finished its work in March and put forth a plan that strikingly resembled the Gray Plan. This plan still had to pass in the General Assembly.

On March 31, the Defenders held a rally with five thousand angry protesters on the steps of the state capitol and “tried mightily to urge the legislature to renewed defiance.” Edward Silverman, the spokesman for the Defenders, “called on the legislature to ‘regain the leadership’ which had been ‘so shamefully surrendered in recent weeks.’”\textsuperscript{15} Out of this protest emerged the Virginia Committee on Constitutional Government or the Bill of Rights Crusade, which in turn became the Virginia Conservative Council, the parent organization of the Virginia Conservative Party. The Perrow Plan faced formidable opposition because the Byrd Organization still controlled the state Senate. To prevent the Senate Education Committee from killing the measure before it reached the floor for a vote, Almond’s supporters proposed forming the Senate into a committee of the whole. The motion passed by a 20-19 vote. Lieutenant Governor A.E.S. Stephens, presiding officer of the Senate and an Almond supporter, ruled the

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 124.

\textsuperscript{14}Wilkinson, \textit{Harry Byrd}, 148.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 148. Edward Silverman later became a founder and candidate of the Virginia Conservative Party.
procedure permissible, and the Perrow plan passed the Senate with the aid of Republican votes. For the first time, the Byrd Organization and the Southside failed to dictate state policy.

Prince Edward County in Virginia’s Southside, one of the original defendants in the Brown v. Board of Education case and the birthplace of the Defenders, refused to surrender. In May 1959, the county’s board of supervisors refused to allocate funds to operate its schools. Not until 1964, after exhausting all legal options and under federal court order to reopen the schools, did Prince Edward County yield. Other areas of Virginia did not react so harshly and accepted the reality that integration was here to stay. Of course, many of these areas had relatively few blacks or were urban areas where residential patterns were segregated. Therefore, Virginia’s policy of massive resistance witnessed the crystallizing of moderate “opposition to the organization and its leadership.”

Old issues reemerged as new coalitions formed to battle the Byrd Organization. The conflict did not bode well for the Organization, as moderate forces appeared poised to challenge the machine’s control of the state, with Governor Almond in the lead.

In the 1959 General Assembly session, Almond proposed the adoption of a state sales tax and an increase in the state budget. The Byrd Organization, with state senators Harry F. Byrd, Jr., and Mills E. Godwin, Jr., and the Speaker of the House of Delegates, E. Blackburn Moore leading the charge, defeated the state sales tax proposal. Almond, however, did secure an increased budget and described the defeat of the sales tax as the

16Eisenberg, “The Emergence of Two-Party Politics,” 54.
"politics of revenge."\(^\text{17}\) With the Perrow Plan and the proposed sales tax, Almond had departed from the hard-line conservatism of the Byrd Organization. These actions represented an attempt to adapt Virginia’s conservatism to the exigencies of the times; they did not imply a retreat from fiscal restraint or a major disruption in the racial status quo. In fact, the Perrow Plan actually succeeded in keeping integration to a minimum. Organization stalwarts, however, were enraged by Almond’s sacrifice of state rights and his abandonment of massive resistance. They viewed the motives of Almond and his supporters suspiciously and consciously sought to reaffirm their control of Virginia politics. Massive resistance may have left the Byrd Machine divided, but the Organization succeeded in temporarily reasserting its control of Virginia politics during the next few years. The defeat of the sales tax, the outcome of the 1960 presidential election in the state, and lastly, the election of the Organization candidate for governor in 1961 were manifestations of the Organization’s continuing strength. Forces which had threatened the Organization since World War II, however, did not disappear.

According to James R. Sweeney, the events of the 1960 presidential election in Virginia foreshadowed “the demise later in the decade of the Byrd Organization as the dominant influence in state politics.”\(^\text{18}\) It would be the last presidential election which Byrd and the Organization influenced, as the state Democratic party moved closer to its national counterpart while discontent with Harry Byrd’s quadrennial “golden silence”


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 3.
reached an unprecedented level. In 1960, however, Byrd was quite active. He not only influenced the state Democratic convention to pass a resolution instructing its delegation to the national convention to vote for Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson of Texas, but, after Kennedy’s nomination, worked behind the scenes to help Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, the Republican candidate, carry Virginia.

Not since 1932 had Virginia’s Democratic party sent an instructed delegation to the national convention. Byrd supported Lyndon Johnson for three reasons. First, Johnson’s campaign was foundering and “Virginia’s resolution of instruction was needed to retain the support of other southern states for the senator from Texas.” Second, LBJ was a southerner and his political philosophy seemed to be closer to Byrd’s than that of Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts. Byrd believed that Johnson “would be the best choice for the South as the Democratic nominee,” as demonstrated by LBJ’s successful efforts to weaken the civil rights bills of 1957 and 1960. Kennedy, on the other hand, had supported the stronger versions. Third, tradition dictated that Governor Almond would head Virginia’s delegation to the national convention. Byrd did not trust Almond and “he wanted to be sure that the governor had no room to maneuver the delegation at Los Angeles, especially since [he] had decided not to attend the convention.”

Virginia’s anti-Byrd Democrats voiced opposition to the resolution of instruction because Johnson had no chance of being nominated and they wanted an opportunity to

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19Ibid.

20Ibid., 10-11
participate in choosing the nominee. Byrd’s opposition did not prevent Kennedy from capturing the nomination. Virginia, however, received a seeming consolation prize with Johnson’s selection as Kennedy’s running mate. Nevertheless, the nomination of Kennedy prompted Byrd and other Organization stalwarts to work surreptitiously for his defeat. These actions and Byrd’s “golden silence” irritated both anti-Byrd Democrats and straight-ticket Byrd Democrats.

George M. Kelley, the political correspondent of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, “found a level of discontent unprecedented in the ten years he had covered Virginia politics.” State legislators and courthouse officials disliked the loss of federal patronage and feared that “voters might become so accustomed to casting ballots for Republicans that the Democrats’ hold on state and local offices would be jeopardized.” Moreover, many Democrats opined that “the national Republican party was not much improvement over the Democrats in the area of civil rights.” Harry Byrd and Organization stalwarts, however, found the national Democratic party anathema to the conservative principles upon which they based their beliefs.

The Democratic National Convention had adopted a progressive platform which angered Virginia’s conservatives. The platform had a strong civil rights plank that called for the abolition of literacy tests and the poll tax, and the end of segregation. Furthermore, the platform set 1963 as a target date “for every school district affected by the Brown decision to submit to the federal courts a plan for minimum compliance,” and

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21Ibid., 13.

22Ibid., 28.

23Ely, Crisis of Conservative Virginia, 17.
supported the sit-ins against racial segregation in the South. Lastly, but not insignificantly, the platform called for the repeal of Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act, which provided for state right to work laws.\textsuperscript{24} Kennedy declared that it was "a platform on which I can run with enthusiasm and with conviction."\textsuperscript{25} The Virginia delegates, including Almond, "rejected the civil rights plank and stated that they would not be bound by it."\textsuperscript{26} Many conservative Virginians found the platform extremely distasteful and worked covertly to help the Republican candidate win Virginia. The Byrd Organization, however, was not united in this action.

Governor Almond wholeheartedly embraced Kennedy's candidacy and stumped for him throughout the seaboard states, prompting Virginia's die-hard segregationists to accuse him of sacrificing massive resistance and conservative government for a federal judgeship. Organization Democrats, notably Lieutenant Governor A.E.S. Stephens, Attorney General Albertis Harrison, U.S. Senator A. Willis Robertson, and former Governor John Battle, supported Kennedy's candidacy with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Ultimately, ninety of the 134 Democrats in Virginia's General Assembly endorsed the Kennedy-Johnson ticket.\textsuperscript{27} Another segment of Virginia's conservatives, however, found both presidential candidates unacceptable and, under the leadership of the Bill of Rights Crusade, tried to persuade the conservative Republican Senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona and Harry Byrd to run on a conservative third party ticket. Both

\textsuperscript{24}Sweeney, "Whispers in the Golden Silence," 14.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., 50.
Goldwater and Byrd refused this invitation; therefore, this group of conservatives ran a ticket of C. Benton Coiner and Edward Silverman.\textsuperscript{28} The ticket stimulated little interest in the state or the nation.\textsuperscript{29} These developments in the 1960 Presidential election foreshadowed further divisions in the Byrd Organization. Harry Byrd would never again dominate a presidential election in the Old Dominion, but his Organization would continue to influence Virginia politics.

In 1961, Albertis S. Harrison, the Byrd Organization candidate, faced A.E.S. Stephens for governor in the Democratic primary. Stephens, a former Byrd Democrat, had alienated the Organization's leaders with his support of Almond and his strong endorsement of Kennedy. Harrison's candidacy was bolstered among Virginia's conservatives and die-hard segregationists by the inclusion of Mills Godwin and Robert Button, candidates for lieutenant governor and attorney-general respectively, on the same ticket. Both were arch-conservatives, who opposed Almond's surrender on massive resistance. Godwin, moreover, had been the "voice" of massive resistance in the General Assembly, guiding passage of the Stanley Plan.\textsuperscript{30} Stephens ran on a ticket with Armistead Boothe, a leader in the Young Turk revolt, opposing Godwin and T. Munford Boyd, a University of Virginia law professor, opposing Button. The traditional Byrd vs. anti-Byrd primary contest had reappeared after a nine year hiatus.\textsuperscript{31} In the end, the Byrd

\textsuperscript{28}Coiner was a Waynesboro businessman and Silverman was an editor of a small Southside newspaper. Both men were leaders in the Bill of Rights Crusade. Silverman became a founder of the Virginia Conservative Party in 1965.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{30}Eisenberg, "The Emergence of Two-Party Politics," 55.

\textsuperscript{31}The last time a Byrd vs. anti-Byrd primary had occurred was 1952 when Francis Pickens Miller opposed Harry F. Byrd, Sr., for the nomination of the Democratic party to
Organization triumphed as the Harrison-Godwin-Button ticket won both the primary and the general election. The 1960 presidential and 1961 gubernatorial elections, however, were the last statewide elections Harry Byrd and Organization stalwarts would control. Those elections foreshadowed the demise of the Byrd Organization’s control in Virginia.

Andrew Buni in his study, *The Negro in Virginia Politics*, concluded that during the 1960's blacks, “after a half century of seeming indifference, overcame their lethargy and became active participants in state and national politics.” This renewed interest had much to do with actions of both Congress and the federal courts. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the Constitution outlawed the poll tax in federal elections. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 “ended discrimination in public accommodations and employment and laid the foundation for effective school desegregation in the South.” The Voting Rights Act of 1965 “removed the major obstacles to black voting in the most recalcitrant southern states and ensured access for blacks to political power,” providing “the basis for challenge to traditional power relationships in the South.” By the mid-1960's blacks had become a powerful voting bloc, one neither political party could ignore. Leading the way in supporting civil rights initiatives and soliciting black votes was the national Democratic party. This posed quite a problem for southern Democrats. The result was a dramatic political realignment and the resurgence of the Republican Party in the region.

As disenchantment with the national Democratic party grew, southern Democrats were naturally drawn to the Republican Party in presidential elections, and in Virginia, run for the U.S. Senate.


Byrd’s golden silence made voting Republican respectable. The increased black electorate prompted some southern Democrats to moderate their conservative philosophy in hopes of luring black voters. The civil rights movement and the increasing liberalism of the national Democratic party had created a precarious situation for the Byrd Organization and the continuance of hard-line conservative rule. More and more people had grown accustomed to a larger, more active federal government, and many desired such an arrangement. Virginia’s and the South’s social and political system were no longer acceptable to the majority of the people outside of the South. These factors did much to influence the 1964 presidential election, an election which “marked a significant turning point in Virginia politics.”

The 1964 presidential election pitted the Democratic incumbent Lyndon Baines Johnson against the Republican candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater. It became less a battle between Republicans and Democrats, though, and more a battle of ideologies, pitting liberals and moderates against conservatives. The consequences of this election would reverberate for years in Virginia. An immediate result was the rise of a new political party.

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CHAPTER IV
THE 1964 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

From 1961 to 1964, Virginia politics were relatively quiet. The Harrison Administration was essentially the calm before the storm. Governor Harrison focused on industrialization and greater economic prosperity for Virginia. He shied away from the race issue and resisted the Kennedy administration’s pressure to help reopen the closed schools in Prince Edward County. Wilkinson called the administration, the “Harrison Equilibrium,” and stated that “Byrd himself had never seemed in better spirits.”¹ The 1964 presidential election, however, would forever change Virginia’s politics. The contest would be a culmination of past events and the immediate cause of the birth of the Virginia Conservative Party in 1965. An examination of the election including an analysis of Virginia conservatives’ support of Goldwater provides insight into the formation of a third party.

By 1963, President Kennedy’s policies concerning domestic issues including civil rights displeased conservative southern whites. Harrison and James J. Kilpatrick both predicted that in a Kennedy - Goldwater race in 1964, Goldwater would carry Virginia.² For Harry Byrd and other Virginia conservatives, Senator Barry Goldwater represented the true essence of a conservative. He voted against the 1964 Civil Rights Act, believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution, and ardently defended the free market system and individual freedoms. According to Sweeney in his study of the 1964 election,

¹Wilkinson, Harry Byrd, 245.
however, the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, and the succession of LBJ as president “required a reassessment of the political situation in the Old Dominion.”

In 1960, Byrd and the Organization influenced the state Democratic party to endorse Johnson for president. By 1964, however, these same conservative Democrats found LBJ unacceptable because of his adoption of Kennedy’s legislative program. During the 1964 state convention, the Byrd Organization offered a resolution that did not contain an endorsement of LBJ, but called for strict interpretation of the Constitution and commended Senator Byrd and Senator Robertson in their efforts against the civil rights bill of 1964. The resolution, also, urged LBJ “to support and defend the Jeffersonian principles of states’ rights, and the time-honored constitutional principle of separation of power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government,” but did concede that the national convention would nominate him. LBJ, however, was acceptable to the majority of Virginia’s Democrats and when Governor Harrison began reading the resolution to the convention “pro-Johnson delegates began yelling, booing, and waving Johnson-for-president signs.” According to Sweeney, “Liberals and party loyalists supported Johnson enthusiastically. Democratic moderates and even some conservatives were more concerned about Republican gains in recent elections. Democratic unity had suddenly become important to their political survival.”

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3Ibid., 309.
4Ibid., 317.
5Ibid.
6Ibid., 316.
Delegate Edgar Bacon introduced an amendment to the resolution that called for the convention to endorse Johnson and the nominees of the Democratic Party. Despite conservative protestations that LBJ had usurped individual rights and that he was not the same man he was four years ago, a majority of the delegates to the state convention joined together to pass the Bacon Amendment. Bacon recalled that “many Democrats, including Organization people, were ‘tired unto death’ of the party leadership’s nonsupport of the Democratic presidential ticket.”

Pat Jennings, liberal Democratic congressman from Southwest Virginia’s Ninth District, urged passage of the amendment on the grounds that the party had endorsed LBJ in 1960 and that he had done nothing during the last four years that warranted not supporting him now. To Virginia’s hard-line conservative Democrats and die-hard segregationists, however, everything LBJ had done was reason not to support him. LBJ’s legislative program and political philosophy were evidence that the national Democratic Party had deserted the conservative cause. In an editorial endorsing Goldwater, the Blackstone Courier-Record, an avowedly conservative newspaper from the Southside, declared that the Democratic party “which our fathers knew is so different from the Democratic party of today that our fathers would . . . turn over in their graves if they could see what has happened. The solid principles of individual liberties, property rights, freedom of choice, private enterprise, integrity and fiscal responsibility which were once the foundation of the Democratic party have been forsaken.”

The Virginia conservatives who opposed Johnson’s candidacy abhorred him and the national Democratic party for three reasons: civil rights, the anti-poverty program,


8Blackstone Courier-Record, 1 October 1964, 5.
and LBJ’s dramatic change of political philosophy.

On July 2, 1964, President Johnson signed into law the most comprehensive civil rights bill to date. The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed racial segregation in employment, voting, and public accommodations and laid the foundation for widespread school integration by authorizing the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) “to withhold federal education funds from any school district that failed to desegregate.”

Edward Silverman declared that the act was “the first all out attempt by legislative process to subvert personal and property rights for minority grievances.” The act also had special significance for Virginia’s Southside, the area which had been able to avoid desegregation since the Brown decision. Conservatives from areas with heavy black populations believed the act blackmailed school districts into desegregating. An editorial in the Blackstone Courier-Record clearly expressed this attitude. As the Southside editor saw it, LBJ was:

now using the oldest trick in the book to ram his programs down the throats of Americans. All LBJ had to do to accomplish more integration in a few months than two other presidents did in 10 years was to pull out his checkbook and plop it on the desk in full view of Americans . . . What had not been accomplished in more than 10 years in the courts came to pass with only the soft scratching of a pen to bond paper. If there was any fight it was to get at the head of the line where the checks are being passed out.11

Another controversial issue was LBJ’s anti-poverty legislation or “Great Society.”

Virginia’s conservatives considered the fight against poverty futile and believed

9Ely, Crisis of Conservative Virginia, 175.

10Blackstone Courier Record, “The Southside Roundup,” 16 January 1964, 4. Silverman wrote a weekly column for the Blackstone Courier-Record that was an excellent reflection of what Virginia’s Southside conservative whites believed.

11Ibid., 27 May 1965, 7.
that federal aid to relieve poverty would expand the welfare state and hasten the nation
toward socialism.\textsuperscript{12} Silverman opined that “the old Virginians who pledged their lives,
their fortunes and their sacred honor to win freedom from excessive taxation and tyranny
would be amazed today to see how the nation they established is being blackjacked into
socialism with their own hard earned money.”\textsuperscript{13} The anti-poverty legislation was
indicative of the pace of rapid change that characterized the Johnson presidency. In an
editorial, the \textit{Farmville Herald}, another staunchly conservative Southside newspaper,
warned LBJ that he was “moving too fast . . . Everyone hates poverty . . . but you cannot
remove poverty with the sweep of a wand, or the treasury of the United States. The
President’s heart may be in tune with the heart and desires of most people, but his head is
far off balance . . . The nation needs a breathing spell to consolidate the reforms and
social programs.”\textsuperscript{14} While the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and
the Great Society displeased Virginia’s conservatives, what was most disconcerting was
LBJ’s seemingly sudden change of political philosophy.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was considered to be a moderate-conservative Democrat
when he served as a Senator from Texas. Hence, Virginia’s conservative Democrats
endorsed him for president in 1960. When Kennedy received the nomination, many
southern Democrats were pleased by his choice of LBJ as his vice-president. By 1964,
however, LBJ was a changed man and Virginia’s conservatives used this “flip-flop” to

\textsuperscript{12}Richard T. Short, interview by author, 21 November 1996, Virginia Beach,
Virginia; Dr. Harry S. Riley, interview by author, 16 September 1997, Virginia Beach,
Virginia.

\textsuperscript{13}Blackstone Courier-Record, “The Southside Roundup,” 13 February 1965, 5.

\textsuperscript{14}Farmville Herald, 2 July 1965, C-1.
attack him. Silverman, in his “Southside Roundup” column in the Blackstone Courier-Record, quoted a letter written by Johnson in 1957 to the Arlington, Virginia Chapter of the Defenders concerning his stand on civil rights legislation. LBJ wrote: “I do not know where you could have gotten the idea that I am supporting the so-called civil rights legislation now before the Congress... The bill that has been introduced is one to which I am very much opposed, as I do not believe it would advance any legitimate cause.” Silverman asked, “IS THIS THE SAME... Lyndon B. Johnson now President of the United States?”

Yes it’s LBJ alright but how he has changed... This is the Johnson who failed to get the Democratic nomination for President in 1960 and who turned his back on his supporters and himself became a passionate supporter of the Brothers Kennedy and the entire foul-smelling ‘New Frontier’... the same LBJ who pushed through the evil so-called civil rights bill of 1964... the same LBJ who will use every trick of the political trade to force this unconstitutional bill through the Senate and thereby shackel (sic) the citizens of this nation... with the chains of despotism.  

Virginia’s conservatives believed that LBJ had embraced liberal policies to capitalize on the increasing political activity of African-Americans. The civil rights and anti-poverty legislation he introduced was designed to elevate the black race and endeared him to many a black voter. His newfound appeal to African-American voters served him well in 1964 as black voter registration soared after removal of the poll tax in federal elections. Further bolstering LBJ’s support among liberals, unions, and African-Americans was his opponent, Barry Goldwater.

The reasons that LBJ’s supporters despised Goldwater’s philosophy of government were the reasons why conservatives found him so attractive. Virginia’s

15Blackstone Courier-Record, “The Southside Roundup,” 13 February 1965, 5. The bill to which Silverman was referring was the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
conservatives as well as conservatives throughout the nation believed that Goldwater represented the best opportunity to return the United States to the principles upon which the country was founded and to move it away from the "socialist" philosophy of the national Democratic party. The Petersburg Progress-Index endorsed Goldwater, stating that the Goldwater-Miller ticket offered "the best hope for a return to constitutional government and the restraints which constitutional government imposes." The Blackstone Courier-Record, in an impassioned editorial recalling the nation's sacrifices, advised its readers that Goldwater was the choice of freedom:

The fact that [Barry Goldwater] voted against the Civil Rights bill, although it was a very unpopular stand and almost cost him the nomination should endear him to every person who believes a man has the right to do what he pleases with his own property... If the present administration remains in power the rape of the Constitution will continue... Eight more years of Johnson with Hubert Horatio Humphrey riding shotgun and waiting his turn at the reins could very well push this country over the brink of disaster... If America is to survive it must change its course. The hour is late, the crisis is at hand... if America is forever to be the land of the free and the home of the brave; if Concord Bridge, Appomattox, San Juan Hill, The Argonne, Iwo Jima, the Fourth of July, the Star Spangled Banner have any meaning at all, November 3, 1964 will see the election of Barry Goldwater. November 3 will be a time when Americans will either go down in history or down in socialism. There is a choice and it's yours to make.

The 1964 presidential election provided liberal and conservative Virginia voters with a clear choice.

On the role of government, conservatives believed that LBJ embraced a controlled economy and an all-powerful central government while Goldwater embraced free enterprise and a balanced government. On civil rights, LBJ stated that "We seek to give

16Petersburg Progress-Index, 8 October 1964, A-4.

17Blackstone Courier-Record, 1 October 1964, 5.
every American, of every race and color, his full rights under the law,” while Goldwater declared, “If you ever hear me quoted as favoring the right to associate - without favoring the equally vital right not to associate - look again, because somebody will be kidding you.”18 Many of Virginia’s conservatives, Democrat, Republican, and independent, embraced his candidacy.

Democrats for Goldwater-Byrd was a continuation of similar groups that had developed during the presidential elections of 1952, 1956, and 1960. In 1964, the group worked to persuade “Virginians to put ‘principle over party’” and vote for Goldwater and Byrd, “who have the same ideas of sound government.”19 Richard T. Short, chairman of the Fourth District’s Democrats for Goldwater-Byrd, invited Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina to stump across Virginia’s Southside in support of these candidates.20 Thurmond had recently denounced the national Democratic party for, among other reasons, destroying the Constitution, promoting fiscal irresponsibility, and assisting communist enemies abroad and at home. He had endorsed Goldwater and switched party affiliation.21 Short stated that, “The purpose of the invitation to Senator Thurmond and his visit to Virginia is to make absolutely sure that the stronghold for constitutional government, the mother-state of Presidents, provides the votes necessary to give Senator

18Petersburg Progress-Index, 8 October 1964, A-4.


20Short was a founder of the Virginia Conservative Party and its finance chairman in 1965.

Barry Goldwater the margin he deserves."

Fifteen Democratic state legislators, mostly from the Southside, also denounced the national Democratic party, but did not so blatantly endorse Goldwater. In a strongly worded statement, these fifteen legislators appealed to voters to halt the continued "drift toward an all-powerful central Government, at the expense of the liberty of its citizens."

Moreover, they believed it "vitally important" to preserve the Constitution and maintain the traditional conservative principles of state rights, limited government, fiscal responsibility, and individual freedom. These legislators declared that:

[W]e cannot recommend or endorse the Johnson-Humphrey candidacy, based as it is on the extreme political philosophy typified by the A.D.A. and other left-wing, socialistic, and collectivist groups. We cannot in good conscience espouse the election at the federal level of candidates whose radical political philosophy is in direct conflict with our own beliefs, the principles for which we have stood in the past, and the principles on which our concept of government is based.

Perhaps the most significant group of Virginia's conservatives to endorse Goldwater and attack Johnson and the national Democratic party was the parent organization of the Virginia Conservative Party, the Virginia Conservative Council.

The Virginia Conservative Council (VCC), an outgrowth of the Bill of Rights Crusade that had nominated a ticket for the 1960 presidential election, was organized on June 24, 1961:

to coordinate the efforts of conservative organizations in Virginia, and to cooperate with similar associations in our sister states, to promote

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22 Blackstone Courier-Record, 1 October 1964, 1,3.

23 Americans for Democratic Action was founded in 1947 as an anti-communist liberal lobby group dedicated to achieving social change, supporting civil rights and cuts in the defense budget.

individual liberty, to curb and restrict the powers of any branch or division of government which exercises powers not granted to it by those whom it governs; to restore the philosophy of the government inspired by the laws of God, and pronounced by its founders in the Constitution of the United States; to preserve the sovereignty of the states against the federal government and sovereignty of the federal government against international government; to guard the rights guaranteed by our constitutional republic from the caprices of the majority; to restore the checks and balances of one branch of the government over the other; to restore economic freedom to the individual; to combat the socialistic philosophy of Marx and Engels which have (sic) permeated the administrative and legislative policies of the federal government.

Furthermore, the Council deplored the absence of “honest political leadership,” and believed that both major parties had “degenerated into self centered organizations . . . concerned only with amassing power and authority.” The Council attacked professional politicians for caring more about careers and personal gains than preserving the Constitution and individual liberties, and believed that only the people committed to individual freedom and limited government could restore the “greatness and strength of the United States.”

On February 9, 1964, the Virginia Conservative Council joined forces with conservative organizations from twenty-four states to organize the National Conservative Council (NCC). The NCC named John W. Carter of Danville, also chairman of the VCC, its national chairman.

Carter stated that the NCC was not a third party, and would not become one unless the Republican National Convention failed to nominate a “constitutional conservative” for president. He defined a constitutional conservative as a person who believes in the basic tenets of the American Constitution, the free enterprise system and


that the least government is the best government. The conservative believes that a man should be treated according to his talents and efforts not as one seeking handouts for nothing.” Furthermore, Carter promised that the NCC would make sure conservatives would “never again have to go to the polls and vote while holding their noses."

In July 1964, the national Republican party nominated Goldwater for president and the NCC endorsed him at its convention in Chicago. The plan for a third party was aborted as the NCC rallied behind the senator’s candidacy. However, Silverman, a delegate to the convention, wrote that the “[NCC] was a ballot position loaded gun aimed at the Republican Party if it did not nominate a constitutional conservative as presidential candidate . . . this dedicated group certainly was not fooling. The ballot position for a third party was ready.” The NCC’s threat to organize a third party foreshadowed the actions of the VCC in 1965 when its leaders deemed no major party candidate for governor acceptable. In 1964, Goldwater’s candidacy satisfied the conservatives’ organization. His candidacy, however, was doomed both in Virginia and the nation in spite of the support of conservative Democrats and the NCC.

Goldwater was a man with strong convictions, who took unpopular stands on issues because he would not compromise his integrity or his principles. His integrity and honesty was perhaps what endeared him to so many conservatives. Goldwater, however, was his own worst enemy. He had suggested privatizing social security and had voted against the civil rights bill. During a campaign speech in Tennessee’s mountain region, he promised to abolish the Tennessee Valley Authority, the means by which many in his

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27 Ibid.

audience received inexpensive electricity. Fear of Goldwater's policies and his supposed itchy nuclear trigger finger combined with the expanded electorate to make the race in Virginia competitive. The final blow for Goldwater came with Governor Harrison's endorsement of LBJ and the arrival of the Lady Bird Special with both Governor Harrison and Lieutenant Governor Mills E. Godwin, Jr., on board.

On September 25, Governor Harrison officially endorsed the Johnson-Humphrey ticket because he believed "that conservative Democrats could accomplish more by staying with the party and making known their point of view."29 On October 5, the Lady Bird Special, a campaign train carrying Lady Bird Johnson and her daughter, Lynda, on a campaign trip through the South, came rolling through Virginia with Harrison and Godwin on board. The politically astute Sidney Kellam, LBJ's campaign manager in Virginia and a man with strong ties to the Byrd Organization, encouraged Godwin to ride the train. Kellam told Godwin, "It would be a good move for you." Godwin intended to run for governor in 1965 and "it was vital that he overcome his reputation as a supporter of massive resistance to school desegregation and broaden his appeal within the party."30 Godwin introduced the president in Alexandria. Years later he recalled that "It was an excellent strategic move," as he soon received pledges of support for his "unannounced candidacy" from Northern Virginia's state legislators.31 According to Sweeney, Harrison and Godwin's "favorable attitudes" toward LBJ, were important in his carrying the

29Danville Register, 2 October 1964, B-3.


31Ibid.
On November 3, LBJ carried Virginia, the first Democratic presidential candidate to do so since Truman in 1948. For the first time in history, Virginia’s total vote surpassed one million; LBJ captured 558,038 votes (53.5 per cent) while Goldwater garnered 481,334 votes (46.2 per cent). LBJ’s victory was attributed to his strong support in the urban areas and among African-Americans, and “was aided by the defection of key Republican areas from support of the Goldwater and Miller candidacies.”

He won with large margins in the urban Second and Tenth congressional districts, and the rural southwest’s Ninth. He also carried the traditionally Republican Seventh district, which had voted for Nixon in 1960. LBJ captured nearly the entire black vote, estimated at 160,000, foreshadowing “the political power that black Virginians would exercise in the future.”

This wide-spread appeal among African-Americans, however, contributed to his loss in the traditionally Democratic Southside. For the first time since Reconstruction, the Southside’s Fourth District voted Republican in a presidential contest. Goldwater also won Virginia’s Third, Fifth, and Sixth districts, although his margin of victory was less than Nixon’s in 1960. The Fourth and Fifth Districts were Virginia’s black belt districts where the racial issue was most acute.

The 1964 presidential election foreshadowed significant changes in Virginia’s political culture. First, African-Americans emerged as a powerful voter bloc. The

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32 Ibid., 346-347.


election revealed the potential power of the black vote, and also, the waning political influence of Virginia’s Southside. The defection of Southside conservatives from the Democratic party occurred not only in 1964, but would continue in 1965 and 1966. Southside conservatives, the backbone of Virginia’s conservative political heritage, considered the election of Johnson and the continuation of liberal policies that attracted black voters a threat to conservative rule. Not all conservatives within Virginia, however, considered the election results a threat. For some it was an awakening to the changes occurring throughout the nation.

This awakening created deep fissures within the Byrd Organization between realists and idealists. In order to keep Virginia moving forward in a positive direction, the realists, including Harrison and Godwin, believed it was necessary to adapt to the exigencies of the times. This adaptation included accepting integration, expanding the state government, raising taxes, and modifying the commonwealth’s commitment to pay-as-you-go financing. The idealists, however, found any compromise of conservative principles, especially involving white supremacy, unacceptable and were aghast that the politicians they had supported for office in 1961 would endorse LBJ in 1964 and ride the Lady Bird Special.

Perhaps the most significant result of the 1964 presidential election in Virginia was the rise of the Virginia Conservative Party, which would play a major role in the Byrd Organization’s demise. Richard T. Short, the party’s finance chairman, recalled years later: “I do not think the party would have ever been formed except for the Lady Bird Special... The people that we had all supported got on that train and there was
tremendous resentment." This resentment quickly grew into vociferous attacks against Harrison and Godwin, foreshadowing the rise of the Virginia Conservative Party and setting the stage for the 1965 gubernatorial election.

Ultra-conservatives and die-hard segregationists were extremely disappointed that Harrison and Godwin supported Johnson. One unsigned letter told Harrison that he was in good company and listed other supporters of LBJ, whom the author believed were "enemies" of Virginia and liberty, including the Communist Party, the N.A.A.C.P., A.D.A., Martin Luther King, Jr., Roy Wilkins, Fidel Castro, Josip Tito, and Nikita Khrushchev. Another letter accused Harrison of seeking a federal judgeship. The writer asked Harrison how could he support the Johnson-Humphrey ticket and answered, "Perhaps because you, like that turn-coat Almond, look with great anticipation for that Johnson appointment to some Federal bench." Godwin, however, received the brunt of conservative attacks.

In the eyes of Virginia's conservatives who supported Goldwater, Godwin's actions inextricably associated him with Johnson and the liberal philosophy of government. In an editorial, the Lynchburg News, a newspaper in Virginia's Sixth district, asked, "Is the next Governor of Virginia going to be a Johnson-Humphrey 'liberal'? Apparently so, if he is Lt. Governor Mills E. Godwin Jr., the heir-apparent to the governorship." The editorial quoted Godwin as saying, "I see little to be gained by electing conservative candidates," and promised not to let him or the voters forget that

36Richard T. Short interview.
38Patrick Henry Wellington IV to Albertis S. Harrison, 9 October 1964, ibid.
The most vociferous in his opposition to Godwin and the Democratic Party, state and national, was John W. Carter, the chairman of the Virginia Conservative Council.

On October 23, at a rally for Goldwater in Prince Edward County, Carter declared that:

Here, where political integrity once set us apart from the nation, we find that our leadership has deteriorated into pure political expediency and prostitution. We have seen in this campaign Sidney Kellam, disciple of political expediency par excellence, wrest the political leadership in Virginia from our very conscientious Senator Byrd without even a struggle. The political power has passed to Kellam without a contest, and he has bludgeoned half of the General Assembly into supporting Johnson for fear of political reprisals.40

After the election, Carter attacked Godwin for lacking conviction, stating, “When it looked like the power was going over to the Kellam Machine . . . he jumped to the liberal side and went tromping about the state speaking for Johnson.” According to Carter, the Virginia Conservative Council “would do all it could to keep the governorship from going to” Godwin by either supporting a conservative candidate in the July 1965 Democratic primary, running an independent candidate in November, or backing the Republican gubernatorial nominee.41 The Danville Register questioned the impact of Carter’s exhortations against Godwin and argued that, “If Godwin needed some device to make him acceptable to those elements in the Democratic Party which centered their fight on him in the last statewide primary . . . the selection of Godwin as a target by the

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41Danville Register, 10 November 1964, B-1.
Conservatives in Virginia's Southside would turn the trick neatly.\textsuperscript{42} Godwin wrote to a friend that he considered Carter's statements "helpful rather than harmful."\textsuperscript{43} Carter's statements worked in favor of Godwin's attempts to appeal to the moderate-liberal, African-American, and labor vote, and represented a harbinger of ultra-conservative disenchantment in 1965.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., A-4.

\textsuperscript{43}Mills E. Godwin, Jr., to Ben Jacobs, 10 December 1964, Box 2, Folder 44, Mills. E. Godwin, Jr., Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Book Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. Hereafter cited as Godwin Papers.
CHAPTER V
THE FORMATION OF THE VIRGINIA CONSERVATIVE PARTY

By 1965, Virginia was in the throes of political, social, and economic change. African-American Virginians had overcome a half-century of political apathy during the early 1960's and the Commonwealth's urban areas slowly increased their political power. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 effectively ended segregation in all facets of life, while the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Supreme Court removed the major obstacles to voting for African-Americans. Also, during the Harrison Administration, Virginia experienced unprecedented industrial growth. These changes did not bode well for the rural-dominated Byrd Organization. Gone were the days when frugality and adherence to state rights and white supremacy was a winning formula for elections. It was apparent by the mid-1960's that the federal government would no longer condone the continuation of racial segregation and that many of the nation's citizens welcomed a larger, centralized government. In order to survive, the Byrd Organization would have to adapt to the exigencies of the times. Perhaps, no one understood this better than Mills E. Godwin, Jr.

Godwin was a shrewd politician who realized that the traditional conservative political philosophy typified by Harry F. Byrd, Sr., and the Virginia Conservative Council was no longer tenable in a rapidly changing Virginia. He adapted his conservative philosophy to meet these changes, and consequently, amassed an impressive array of support from all elements of the state Democratic party. The Virginia Conservative Council had hoped to oppose Godwin in the primary, but by January, he had already secured the Democratic nomination by default. The only other option for the Council, in
keeping with its founding tenets, was to endorse the candidates of the Republican Party. By the end of June, however, the Council decided that Linwood Holton, nominated for governor at the state Republican Party convention in May, was not a conservative.

Neither Godwin nor Holton, however, were liberals. Both espoused basic conservative beliefs. So, why did the Virginia Conservative Council act as it did? The principal reason behind the Council’s opposition to Godwin was his ride on the Lady Bird Special and his endorsement of the Johnson-Humphrey ticket. According to Richard T. Short, “the Johnson/Humphrey ticket is what created the Conservative Party of Virginia . . . [I]f ‘silence is golden’ had been followed in 1964, the Virginia Conservative Party would have never been formed.” Godwin’s actions inextricably linked him with the national Democratic Party and the liberals. Council members considered Godwin’s endorsement of Johnson as an effort to secure African-American and liberal support for his candidacy, thus representing pure political expediency and a complete political transformation.

In March, the Virginia Conservative Council formally announced its opposition to Godwin and his running mate for Lieutenant Governor, Fred G. Pollard. The Council declared that their joining of forces with Sidney Kellam and his “ultra-liberal organization” in 1964 to support the Johnson-Humphrey ticket meant one of two things:

Either they have abandoned their previously avowed conservative convictions for constitutional government and states rights and have wholeheartedly embraced the socialistic philosophy of the Johnson-Humphrey administration (which frankly stands for a larger, more centralized welfare state, the usurpation of the rights of the states, further mockery of the Constitution and the addition of more and more dictatorial and despotic powers in the federal government); or That for reasons of pure selfish political expediency these candidates gave active support to that Johnson-Humphrey philosophy of government which threatens the existence of this constitutional republic.

Since the Council believed that Godwin and Pollard had either become avowed liberals or opportunistic politicians, it considered neither “proper persons to administer the affairs of Virginians or to act as guardians of Virginia’s sovereignty.” Furthermore, since many of the Commonwealth’s conservative Democratic political leaders had endorsed Godwin and Pollard, the Council believed that Virginia’s Democratic Party was “no longer the voice of conservative Virginians but the Virginia counterpart of the socialistically oriented national Democratic Party.”

Godwin’s cultivation of Virginia’s liberal Democrats disappointed Virginia’s Conservatives, as George Melton, a founder of the Virginia Conservative Party, made clear in a letter to the candidate. He wrote that Godwin was the only reason he supported the Harrison-Godwin-Button ticket in 1961. By 1965, however, Melton concluded that Godwin was a changed man, a man willing to change his conservative principles for political expediency. He considered Godwin’s statement to the Democratic State Central Committee and his speeches that “came dangerously close to, if not actually, saying that you preferred a Democrat over anyone else” as indicating that Godwin “preferred men of Henry Howell’s philosophy with a Democratic label to someone of say Dick Poff’s caliber without the label.” For Melton, this could mean but one thing, that Godwin’s principles were now “subjegated (sic) to the party.” He was also disgusted by Godwin’s cultivation of W. Pat Jennings, Virginia’s liberal Democratic congressman from the Ninth District. Although Godwin had assured him that this was a way of “parrying a thrust in

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3Henry Howell was a liberal state senator from Norfolk. Richard (Dick) Poff was a conservative Republican congressman from Virginia’s Sixth District.
[Jenning's] direction from the Northern & Eastern liberals and avoiding a primary fight,” Melton believed that Godwin wanted “Mr. Jennings and these same liberals in the forefront of the fight during the coming event.” He asked Godwin what had endeared him “to the likes of Pat Jennings, Armistead Boothe, Mose (sic) Riddick, Henry Howell and all the other political liberals in this state that would sell not only their own souls but ours as well, if it would be beneficial to their own interests.” Melton accepted the fact that Godwin would become Virginia’s next governor, but told him “that you did not have to break the faith to get there.” With its denunciation of Godwin and the state Democratic Party, the Council looked for Virginia’s Republican Party to offer Virginians a conservative choice in the gubernatorial election.

The Conservative Council had clearly indicated that it would wholeheartedly support the Republican party if it nominated “constitutional conservatives,” who would force “Godwin and Pollard to defend the surrender of Virginia to the Johnson-Humphrey administration.” Instead, Virginia Republicans nominated A. Linwood Holton, Jr., a moderate Republican from Roanoke, cast in the mold of Dwight Eisenhower, rather than Barry Goldwater. A major reason the Conservatives found Holton unacceptable was their disenchantment with the Republican Party in the aftermath of the 1964 election.

The Council and other conservatives who supported Goldwater had hoped that the Republican Party would fill the conservative void in Virginia politics as the state Democratic Party continued to drift toward the philosophy of its national counterpart. However, Johnson’s trouncing of Goldwater influenced many Republican party leaders to

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4George Melton to Mills E. Godwin, Jr., 18 October 1965, Series I, Box 4, Folder 76, Godwin Papers.

5Ibid.
renounce the conservative philosophy Goldwater espoused in order to attract votes from all factions of the electorate. Virginia’s Republican party was no exception. Immediately following the election, Virginia’s state Republican chairman, Robert Corber, declared that, “Senator Goldwater has been completely repudiated at the polls. He should not be the leader of the party under any circumstances.” It was evident that Goldwater’s conservatism would not become the battle cry of the state Republican Party, a development that many of Virginia’s conservatives clearly lamented.

These conservatives believed that the state Republican Party was mimicking the Democrats in an effort to secure the liberal and African-American vote. After Holton wrote Carter, asking “in strictest confidence” his “personal advice and thinking as to the merits or demerits” of waging a campaign for governor, Carter replied with a scathing critique of Virginia’s Republican Party, writing that neither the nation nor Virginia needed “a two-party system wherein both parties subscribe to the same philosophy of government.” Carter expressed his disappointment that the state Republican party did not choose to attract conservatives after the presidential election demonstrated that a conservative faction no longer existed in Virginia’s Democratic party. He considered the Republicans’ refusal to challenge Democrats “on matters of Constitutional government, states rights, socialism in government, etc.” and endorsement of a “number of non-controversial, me too mouthings about better education and being for mother and country and against sin,” to be an attempt to attract the African-American vote. He scorned their willingness “to subscribe to any of Johnson’s civil rights programs in the fantastic hope of wooing that fawned over and pampered minority away from their idol, Lyndon

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6 Danville Register, 8 November 1964, A-4.
Carter advised Holton that:

The only hope which I can see for the Republican Party of Virginia would be to try and weld together the conservatives of both the Democratic and Republican parties, which have been spurned by both their parties. With our nation standing on the verge of dictatorship, with the change of our economy from free enterprise to a Marxist economy and with our nation being sold out daily by a disloyal State Department, conservatives are not just interested in changing their names to [R]epublican so long as the Republican Party continues to emulate the Democratic party.  

The direction of Virginia's Republican Party not only infuriated the Conservative Council, but also conservative Republicans, who had enthusiastically supported Goldwater in 1964.

In announcing his resignation as vice-chairman of the Fourth District Republican committee, Dr. Stuart B. White declared that the Virginia Republican Party's refusal to oppose "Medicare, federal aid to education (blackmail), and federal control of hiring practices" and its promotion of "men who would not support the party when it needed support" represented an attempt to "gain the vote of one certain block of people which already had been bought by the Democrats." According to White, Republicans would "rather have votes than a clear conscience." Voting for Holton would be akin to voting "for the principles of Godwin which helped propel Johnson's greatly taxed society to heights undreamed." Although the direction of the Republican party annoyed many conservatives, Holton's refusal to meet the Conservative Council to discuss specific issues was the final reason for their refusal to support him.

Several times during the months of May and June, Carter invited Holton to appear

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8Blackstone Courier-Record, 14 October 1965, 1.
before the executive committee of the Council to answer questions concerning his position on such issues as: federal usurpation of local and state rights; demands of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) regarding school integration; the poll tax, and voting requirements in state and local elections; “pay as you go”; racial demonstrations and state support for communities facing such demonstrations; and a sales tax. The Council desired to meet with Holton and his running mates to make a distinction between the two major party platforms and learn their “views on subjects other than education, traffic accidents, and industrial development.”

In replying to Carter’s invitation, Holton informed him that Naval Reserve duty prevented his meeting with the Council in May and early June, but that a meeting in Roanoke during the week of June 21 could be arranged. Holton also told Carter that his positions on specific issues would be consistent with the state Republican Party’s platform, including removal of the poll tax and other voting restrictions. Furthermore, he stated that he had no remedy to stop the actions of HEW and that he was “unalterably opposed” to the proposal of organizing a state militia to combat racial demonstrations. While Holton continued to hedge on appearing before the Council, the Council announced its intention to hold a Constitutional Conservative Convention on July 10 for the purpose of evaluating the platforms of both major parties and determining whether a “choice” existed. If no conservative choice existed, the Council intended to nominate an

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10 John W. Carter to A. Linwood Holton, Jr., 1 June 1965, ibid. Running on the Republican ticket with Holton was Vincent Callahan for Lieutenant Governor and Dortch Warriner for Attorney General.

independent slate of candidates.

Holton, knowing that his views differed from the Virginia Conservative Council, announced on June 15 that he would not appear before the Council. He stated that an appearance of the Republican candidates before the Council might provide encouragement for the formation of a third party. Carter considered Holton’s refusal an indication that no philosophical difference existed between the Virginia Republican Party and the “liberal dominated” Virginia Democratic Party, and “that a frank discussion of his ideas would immediately alienate the great mass of Conservatives who supported Goldwater.” Holton reinforced this impression in his opening campaign speech during which he criticized massive resistance. According to Carter, the speech revealed that Holton “was the same type of disciple of massive resistance which brought about the betrayal of our state. I can now see why Mr. Holton would not permit the Virginia Conservative Council to interview him in view of his apparent willingness to surrender the right of local self-government in Virginia to the federal system. In short, it appears that he is just as willing to surrender Virginia to the War on Poverty as is Godwin.”

Louis A. Brooks also voiced his displeasure with Holton for not appearing before the Council. He wrote Carter that he usually voted Republican, but “when Linwood Holton refused to discuss the issues with you I presumed him to be too liberal for my support.”

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14 John W. Carter to Alexander Hudgins, 22 June 1965, ibid.

15 Louis A. Brooks, Jr., to John W. Carter, 17 September 1965, ibid. Brooks was the Conservative candidate for Lieutenant Governor in 1969.
With Godwin and Holton unacceptable, the Council also had the option of endorsing George Lincoln Rockwell, the gubernatorial candidate of the American Nazi Party.

In April, Rockwell had announced his candidacy claiming support from the Southside and pledging to end racial mixing. The Council never even considered supporting Rockwell for governor and both the Danville Register and Carter deemed his remark that “if it depended only on Danville, we would be in now” disparaging. The Register declared that Danville was not Ku Klux Klan country and would never support Rockwell. Carter wrote that the Council “has nothing to do with Lincoln Rockwell and has no intention of supporting his candidacy” and that Danville’s citizens “would never be induced to follow the leadership of a man as irresponsible as Rockwell.” Now that all other choices had been exhausted the Council had no other option but to nominate an independent slate of candidates.

On July 10, 1965, the Virginia Constitutional Conservative Convention met at the Hotel Jefferson in Richmond. In the three hours it took the convention to conduct its business, the delegates acted unanimously in nominating candidates for Virginia's top three offices and a host of state and local offices, and adopting an eight plank platform. The Virginia Conservative Party was organized to provide the voters of Virginia a conservative choice in the general election on November 2, halt the increasing encroachment of a “Marxist-oriented” federal government, and expose the “liberal-

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16Danville Register, 20 April 1965, A-1.
17Ibid., A-4.
18John W. Carter to J. Clifford Miller, 26 April 1965, Carter Papers.
dominated Republican Party as a mere reflection of the Democrat Party" and "the Democrat Party as socialist-dominated and led by puppet-politicians."\(^{20}\) Over three hundred delegates and observers attended, representing thirty counties and cities. The most heavily represented areas were the Southside, Lower Tidewater and Richmond.\(^{21}\)

The convention nominated William J. Story, Jr., Reid T. Putney, and John W. Carter, respectively, for governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general. Story was an assistant superintendent of city schools in Chesapeake and a proud member of the John Birch Society. He accepted the nomination because he believed that the "Communist conspiracy is a serious threat to this country, local, state, and national."\(^{22}\) Putney, previously the Republican county chairman of Goochland County, was a forestry consultant and resident of Manakin. When the Republican state chairman Corber accused him of deserting "the GOP for the promise of a high place on the Conservative ticket," Putney retorted that he deserted the GOP because of "its complete liberalism nationally and on the state level."\(^{23}\) Carter was a Danville city councilman and attorney. He recalled that he was chosen for Attorney General only because the ticket needed a lawyer and the party did not have many lawyers.\(^{24}\) Aside from nominating candidates the convention also adopted an eight plank platform that was designed to "stem the malignant

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\(^{21}\)Norfolk Virginian- Pilot, 11 July 1965, A-1.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 15 July 1965, B-1.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., 12 July 1965, A-22.

\(^{24}\)John W. Carter, interview by author, 23 October 1997, Danville, Virginia.
destruction of... freedom."25

The platform clearly reflected the Party’s disenchantment with the growing strength of the federal government, expedient politicians, the civil rights movement, and what it saw as the influence of communism. To stymie the growth of the federal government and its continued intrusion into state affairs, the Conservative Party proposed several solutions. First, the Party called for Virginia to become economically independent of the federal government. By stopping the infusion of federal aid, which they considered mere blackmail, the Conservatives wanted to preserve state rights and, most importantly, eliminate federal control of Virginia’s public schools. This proposal would return control to the localities and allow them to choose how to educate their children as they saw fit, which, undoubtedly, would include segregation in many school systems. Second, the Conservative Party wanted to limit dependence on welfare by offering employment instead of the dole and requiring mandatory sterilization for unwed mothers giving birth to a second illegitimate child as prerequisite for receiving welfare benefits. Third, to prevent the continued erosion of Virginia’s sovereignty at the hands of expedient politicians, the Conservative Party wanted the Commonwealth’s executive, judicial, and legislative officials to pledge not to accept any federal appointive position for at least ten years after the expiration of their terms.26

The platform also revealed the Conservative Party’s displeasure with deficit spending, which it considered fiscal irresponsibility, and increased taxation. The

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26The Conservative Party wanted to prevent a repeat of Almond’s surrender of massive resistance and Harrison’s endorsement of Johnson. Many conservatives believed Almond and Harrison acted as they did to receive appointments to the federal bench.
Conservatives called for Virginia to retain “pay-as-you-go” and for Virginians not to yield “to the temptation of mortgaging the incomes of their children and grandchildren for their own comforts.” Moreover, the Conservative Party vowed to enact a capitation tax rather than a sales tax, “to be levied annually upon every adult Virginian so that each Virginian will pay his fair share of the cost of government and at the same time be aware of what the government is costing him.” The Conservative Party also implicitly attacked the methods of the civil rights movement by calling for the state government to fulfill its fundamental function of maintaining law and order and protecting property, and “lend its every facility to any locality besieged by lawlessness under the guise of the exercise of constitutional rights.” Lastly, the platform indicated the Conservative Party’s concern about the alleged communist influences permeating the nation and the impact these influences were having on the preservation of freedom. The Conservatives called for the state government to assume the function of investigating and exposing “subversive influences within the state, including educational and religious institutions.”

The platform’s major focus revolved around the themes of state rights and anti-communism, two themes that formed the basis of the Conservative Party’s campaign rhetoric during the few years it existed. The Conservative Party and its candidates eschewed any overt reference to segregation and white supremacy, but to be sure disruption of the racial status quo was a major concern. Much like the leaders of massive resistance during the 1950's and George Wallace during the 1960's, the Conservative Party couched its rhetoric around the issues of anti-communism and state rights to appeal to a wider audience and disguise its feeling about integration. The party’s disdain for the

anti-poverty program and the growing welfare state was also related to its opposition to a larger centralized government which adhered, in their view, to a subversive ideology.
CHAPTER VI
THE 1965 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

During the 1965 gubernatorial campaign, the Conservative candidates repeatedly warned of the rise of communism, denounced the growing strength of the federal government, decried the loss of individual freedom, and attacked the Democratic and Republican parties for following policies that encouraged these trends. Moreover, they castigated Godwin and Holton for practicing party over principle and surrendering to the federal government for the sake of political expediency. The Conservative Party, however, addressed the rise of communism more than any other issue.

Warning of the dangers associated with the rise of communism, the Conservative candidates declared that the subversive ideology had permeated the federal government, the Democratic and Republican parties, and the civil rights movement. Story charged the Johnson Administration with refusing to appoint people who expose communist threats, while allowing "law-breaking civil rights workers" to descend upon Virginia. He also decried the appointment "of known communist sympathizers" such as Abe Fortas, Arthur Goldberg, and Arthur Wieland to responsible federal positions.\(^1\) He predicted that unless change occurred "Virginians are going to wake up some Saturday morning and see a big Asiatic, African, or even Caucasian policeman standing on the corner ordering everybody

\(^1\)Farmville Herald, 28 September 1965, A-1. Abe Fortas was a close political advisor to President Johnson, who was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1965. Arthur Goldberg served as a Supreme Court justice from 1962 to 1965, until resigning to become the Ambassador to the United Nations. Arthur Wieland served as a State Department official.
to stay inside that day.” Carter believed that the most important issue in the campaign was “to prevent the subversion of education to a federal bureaucracy, which will stifle all intellectual freedom and brain wash our children with Marxism.” He blamed communism for the recent racial disorders and pledged to place the state’s police powers and attorney general’s office “at the disposal of Virginia’s municipalities so that they won’t continue to be left high and dry.” Also, he promised that the Conservative Party would “ferret out the communists” by establishing a state bureau to expose and investigate subversive influences.4

Reid Putney declared that “freedom is the issue” in the campaign, not highway safety, education, and industrial development and declared that not once during the campaign had any candidate other than the Conservative candidates mentioned communism. He stressed that an atmosphere existed that overemphasized security at the expense of freedom, and reminded Virginians that our forefathers established a government that gave the people “a right to opportunity not security.”5 He believed that security was a “false goal” and that “Man must face the risk of insecurity” and that the federal bureaucrats should cease trying to plan our lives “from the cradle to the grave.”6

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4Richmond News Leader, 1 October 1965, 8.

3John W. Carter to Geoffrey Kerr, 14 September 1965, Carter Papers.

4Farmville Herald, 28 September 1965, A-1. Also, Story promised that when elected governor, he would work for “less government,” support efforts to repeal the 14th amendment, and “to reserve to the states the right to reapportion their legislatures.” (Richmond News Leader, 20 August 1965, p. 21.)

5Petersburg Progress-Index, 1 October 1965, A-1; Farmville Herald, 28 September 1965, A-1.

6Richmond News Leader, 16 October 1965, 8.
Putney attacked federal aid and denounced "big government spending as creating an artificially prosperous economic condition at the expense of our children and grandchildren." To free Virginia from economic dependence on the federal government, the Conservative Party vowed to return the state surplus to the localities.

The party blamed the rise of communism throughout the nation and the growing power of the federal government on the two major political parties. Story declared that the "new" Democratic Party had sacrificed the Constitution, had become the party of minority and labor groups, had supported legislation that destroyed individual rights, had "protected the Supreme Court in a reign of judicial tyranny," had aided communist enemies abroad while appointing communists to positions at home, had complete disregard for responsible fiscal policies, and was "leading the march to a socialistic dictatorship." He called the Republican Party a "me-too" party for subscribing to the same liberal philosophy as the Democratic Party. Carter alleged that Virginia's Democratic Party was offering a "Utopian Society rather like the Great Society," both of which he called "blueprints for bankruptcy." He characterized Virginia's Republican Party as "the illegitimate offspring of the union of Marxism and the national Republican Party" and declared that "instead of Virginia Democrats and Republicans carrying the alarm at the trends of their national parties, they are joining with them in socialism."

The Conservative candidates not only sounded the alarm at the increasing liberalism of the two major political parties, but also personally attacked Godwin and Holton.

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9Richmond News Leader, 28 September 1965, 18.
Carter called Godwin and Holton “sniveling cowards,” who wanted to be elected only to distribute political spoils. Acknowledging that they favored better education and industrial development and “were against automobile accidents,” Carter asked whether either had “the courage to take a stand on counterfeit money and earthquakes.” Story characterized Godwin and Holton as “tweedle dum and tweedle dee” and assailed them for only talking of new and better school facilities, but not the possibilities of losing liberty.

The Conservative candidates also attacked Godwin and Holton for practicing what they considered pure political expediency. Story accused Godwin of not denouncing Johnson and the national Democratic party for fear of losing the minority vote and declared that Godwin was mistaken if he thought he could “ride the Lady Bird Special into the Governor’s Mansion.” According to Carter, Godwin wanted “Big Daddy Lyndon to deliver the liberal and minority votes.” As for Holton, Story alleged that he refused to attack Godwin “for the left-wing activities of the Democratic Party” for fear of losing the support of “Nixon, Rockefeller, Javitts, and Warren.” Carter declared that Holton was no Goldwater, but rather like Rockefeller, Scranton, and Romney, who believe in an “all powerful federal welfare state administered as Johnson does but by Republicans.”

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most bitter denunciations for Lyndon Baines Johnson, calling him a "Hitler-like tyrant who resorts to chicanery, trickery, blackmail and bribery ... who looks benign and quotes the Bible on the boob-tube."\(^{16}\) He declared that it was a "sad commentary on America that a man like that could occupy the White House."\(^{17}\)

In addition to attacking their opponents, the Conservative candidates also challenged Godwin and Holton to a series of debates. Story wanted to "find out why these men filed their candidacy," while Carter wanted to ask how Godwin and Holton "would feel about calling a special session of the legislature to consider appropriating the surplus so that Virginia localities will not have to sell their schools to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in exchange for federal bribes."\(^{18}\) Neither Carter nor Story expected Godwin and Holton to agree to their invitation. Story declared that politicians generally wanted "to say as little as possible during a campaign about their position so they would have little to live up to after being elected," while Carter was "certain neither had the courage to do so."\(^{19}\) Whether or not Godwin or Holton feared the possible ramifications of debating opponents who did not expect to win, and therefore, had nothing to lose was unclear. What was clear was that neither accepted the invitation, and in fact, both Godwin and Holton virtually ignored the Virginia Conservative Party during the campaign.

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\(^{16}\) *Richmond News Leader*, 29 September 1965, 18.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 1 October 1965, 8.


Holton concentrated on attacking Godwin, while Godwin only attacked Story once. At a campaign rally in October, he called Story a reactionary who “sees a Communist behind every tree” and talked “more about alleged Communist influence in government at all levels than about the problems confronting the state.” While it appeared that Godwin was not very concerned with the third party threat, evidence indicates otherwise. In letters written to supporters and Virginia’s elected officials, Godwin expressed concern about the third party’s impact on the Southside and worried that the Conservative Party would mislead Virginia’s conservatives with its impractical and unrealistic philosophy.

Godwin asked supporters to endorse the Democratic ticket publicly and remind voters that he wanted “Virginia to progress and move forward but along sound and safe lines in keeping with the great traditions of Virginia.” To prevent the desertion of Southside conservatives, he shrewdly used the popular Southside conservative Democratic congressmen, William Tuck and Watkins Abbitt. They campaigned throughout the Southside on Godwin’s behalf, gently reminding voters of his conservatism. At a Democratic rally in Buckingham County, Abbitt recalled Godwin’s leadership during the “hectic days” of massive resistance and stated that, although many

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20 Richmond News Leader, 5 October 1965, 7.

21 Mills E. Godwin, Jr., to Watkins M. Abbitt, 16 August 1965, Series I, Box 3, Folder 62, Godwin Papers; Mills E. Godwin, Jr., to A. Willis Robertson, 5 October 1965, Series I, Box 4, Folder 71, ibid; Mills E. Godwin, Jr., to Dr. William Sloan, 5 October 1965, ibid.

22 Mills E. Godwin, Jr., to Dr. William Sloan, 5 October 1965, ibid.
conservatives agreed with the Conservative Party, “a vote for Story was utterly futile.”

Godwin also received support from Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr. Some Conservatives implored Byrd to observe “golden silence,” declaring Godwin was “allied with the most dangerous and socialistic administration ever in power in Washington” and, therefore, nothing but President Johnson’s lieutenant in Virginia. These Conservatives asked Byrd to continue his “courageous stand against the socialistic schemes of big government” and not “dim that reputation at this late date by taking a public stand against the Virginia Conservatives and in favor of” Godwin. In late October, however, Senator Byrd, Sr., with encouragement from State Senator Garland Gray, modestly endorsed Godwin, stating that he stood “for sound progress built on fiscal conservatism.”

Godwin thought that Byrd’s endorsement would help stem the enthusiasm for the Conservative Party in the Southside. When Byrd endorsed Godwin, the Conservative Party was disappointed. One party supporter wrote Byrd that “It grieves me sore to learn . . . that you have placed a flower upon the grave of liberty and joined the ranks of those willing to sacrifice the nation for the sake of the party, in your indorsement (sic) of

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24 Oscar A. Payne to Harry F. Byrd, Sr., 20 October 1965, Box 277, 1961-65 Miscellaneous Correspondence “P” Folder, Harry F. Byrd, Sr., Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Dr. George Reynolds to Harry F. Byrd Sr., 18 October 1965, Box 277, 1961-65 Miscellaneous Political Correspondence “R” Folder, ibid. Hereafter cited as Byrd, Sr. Papers.

25 Heinemann, Harry Byrd of Virginia, 413. On October 13, Gray telephoned Byrd stating that he believed Godwin would greatly benefit in the Fourth District, where the Conservative Party was giving him “a lot of trouble,” if Byrd would write a personal note to a hundred people endorsing Godwin. (Garland Gray to Harry F. Byrd Sr., 13 October 1965, Telephone message, Box 268, 1961-1965 Garland Gray Folder, Byrd, Sr. Papers.)
Godwin for Governor." Story stated that he preferred to remember Byrd in his younger days and that Godwin was not "cast in the mold of the younger Byrd."

Another indication that Godwin was concerned with the impact of the Conservative Party was the money the Democratic Party spent on the campaign. Godwin was facing an attractive opponent in Linwood Holton which explains the Democrats spending nearly three times as much on the race as the Republicans. The presence of the Conservative Party, however, made Holton all the more dangerous. With the Conservatives, mostly disenchanted Democrats, siphoning votes from his candidacy, Godwin realized that he could not afford to take Holton lightly; therefore, he must spend lavishly on his campaign. In contrast to the unprecedented amount the two major parties spent on the campaign, the Conservative Party spent only $44,000.

The Virginia Conservatives started late in organizing for the campaign and did not have the established political organization of the Democrats and Republicans. By mid-September, Short, the party's finance chairman, stated that the Conservative Party had "almost completed organizations" in the Commonwealth's ten congressional districts and that seventy percent of the cities and counties had active chairmen and committees. Also, Short opened a fund-raising drive for $300,000, sending "letters to three hundred city and

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27 Richmond News Leader, 29 October 1965, 4.

28 $220,000 compared to $80,000. (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 9 December 1966, B-4.)

29 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 9 December 1966, B-4.
county finance committee members, with a $1,000 quota allotted each.  

The party fell far short of its goal.

The Conservative Party was a grass roots movement that relied on the political activities and financial support of the common person. Short commented that “it was the working man . . . from your truck driver to your lower echelon bank company executive” that supported the party. “You didn’t have presidents of corporations, judges, sophisticated attorneys to join the group . . . They would laugh at us,” Short remembered, “I talked to some. They would say, I agree with a lot of what you are saying but there’s no way you can win.” Consequently, Short and other founders as well as the candidates themselves financed much of the campaign. Short sold stock while Putney sold timber to help finance the party’s activities. 

Carter flew himself around the state for campaign rallies. Both Story and Carter continued working and campaigned in their spare time. When a reporter asked Carter if he intended to close his law office during the campaign, he retorted, “Of course not. We are just poor boys who have to make a living. We don’t have the Rockefeller money or the Johnson money.” The Conservative Party’s lack of success in fund raising was a strong indication that the party’s agenda did not find wide acceptance throughout the Commonwealth. In fact, other than the Southside, the Conservative Party had only small pockets of support in other areas of Virginia, as is evident from editorial opinion.

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30Ibid., 19 September 1965, B-5.

31Richard T. Short interview.


33Danville Register, 11 July 1965, A-8.
Southside Virginia newspapers provided the Conservative Party with its only editorial support. These newspapers, undoubtedly, endorsed the Conservative Party for the same reasons as the Blackstone Courier-Record, which declared that the Conservative Party offered the voters a choice. The Courier-Record stated that it “cannot follow any man who supported Lyndon Johnson nor can we find any promise in the liberal Republicans who are trying to outdo the Democrats for the Negro vote.” Another Southside newspaper, the Farmville Herald, implied support for the Conservative Party, stating that the party offered definite proposals to stem federal intrusion. In contrast, according to the Herald, the Democrats had no clearly defined platform, while the Republicans had only attacked the Democrats without outlining any “specific proposals for betterment.” Other than the Southside, however, Virginia’s newspapers were not as kind.

The Richmond News Leader questioned the Conservative Council’s logic in forming a third party given the basic conservatism of both major party candidates and declared that the Conservative Party would fail miserably because Virginia had changed dramatically from fifteen years earlier. The Roanoke Times called the Conservative Party a “spite ticket” and added that Virginia’s Republican Party faced “permanent minority party status if right-wing extremists insist on a strategy that will alienate the

34 Newspapers endorsing the Conservative ticket included the Crewe Chronicle, Brunswick Times-Gazette, Southside Virginia News, Sussex-Surry Dispatch, Brookneal Union Star, South Boston News, and South Boston Record Advertiser. (Petersburg Progress-Index, 9 October 1965, A-3.)

35 Blackstone Courier-Record, 9 September 1965, 7.

36 Farmville Herald, 29 October 1965, B-1.

37 Richmond News Leader, 24 June 1965, 10.
political center - which is where the votes are." The *Washington Post* called the Conservative Party a "genuine sign of progress" because for the first time its supporters were "unable to find a roost in either of the major political parties" while the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* concluded that the Conservative candidates would lose, but may "determine who will be elected." In a poll, Virginia’s editors predicted Godwin would receive 55.3 per cent of the vote, Holton, 37.1 per cent, and Story, 7.2 per cent.40

On 3 November, Virginia elected Godwin by the narrowest margin for a Democratic candidate for governor in the twentieth century. Receiving 47.9 per cent, he was the only governor to be elected with a plurality.41 Godwin lost the bulk of the ultra-conservative and die-hard segregationist vote, but won most of the urban areas and the majority of the black vote. The black voter organizations were convinced that the black vote "tipped the scales" in Godwin's favor. Moses A. Riddick Jr., chairman of the Virginia Independent Voters League (VIVL), indicated that preliminary studies showed 100,000 blacks voted with 70-80 per cent voting for Godwin. Dr. William S. Thornton, acting chairman of the Virginia Crusade for Voters, stated that tentative studies showed 70,000 blacks voted and that 55,000 voted for Godwin.42

Holton received 37.6 per cent, the customary share for the Republican


40*Danville Register*, 17 October 1965, A-9. Unfortunately, the article did not state which editors participated in the poll.


gubernatorial candidate in previous elections. Given the large voter turnout, however, he garnered 212,207 votes, the most ever for a Republican. He won the majority of the counties in the traditionally Republican mountain region, but also fared well in other areas, winning Greensville County in the Fourth District, Henrico County in the Third District, and Fairfax and Arlington Counties in the Tenth District. The Virginia Conservative Party surprised everyone, receiving 13.5 per cent. Story garnered 75,307 votes and Putney received 69,941 votes. Carter was the largest Conservative vote getter with 80,542.

The Conservative Party ran strongest in counties with a large black population. Story won eleven counties, all situated in the Fourth and Fifth Districts, Virginia’s black belt, with the exception of Chesterfield located in the Third District. Chesterfield had voted overwhelmingly for Goldwater in 1964, and, according to James Latimer, the Richmond Times-Dispatch political correspondent, had gone from being one of Virginia’s most conservative Byrd Democratic counties to a conservative, segregationist Republican county as a result of “white flight” from Richmond. John Carter tried to refute the interpretation that the Conservatives’ strong showing in the Southside

43Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, 242-47.


45The Conservative Party carried the counties of Amelia, Brunswick, Chesterfield, Charlotte, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Powhatan, Prince George, Surry, and Sussex.

"stemmed from racial friction."\textsuperscript{47}

Carter was disturbed that Southside Virginians only received credit for "an emotional reaction to racial demonstrations and the Civil Rights bill" not for their patriotism and concern "about their country and the socialistic direction it has taken."\textsuperscript{48}

There was no doubt that the Conservative Party's supporters were concerned with the impact of what they considered the rise of socialism. The Conservative candidates, however, repeatedly alleged that the civil rights movement and racial disturbances stemmed from a socialist philosophy. In the counties the Conservative Party won, the average African-American population was 44.8 per cent. In contrast, the average African-American population in the counties and cities Godwin and Holton won was 26 per cent and 7.2 per cent, respectively.\textsuperscript{49} The Conservative Party's support did stem, therefore, was, in part, the result of an emotional reaction by whites to the civil rights bills and racial disturbances. The election results not only indicated who supported the Conservative Party and why, but raised some interesting questions.

How would Godwin have fared had he not boarded the Lady Bird Special?

Several ardent Conservatives speculated that he would have run much stronger since most of Story's supporters were disenchanted Democrats. However, if Godwin had not endorsed Johnson, he would have most likely lost the moderate-liberal, labor union, and

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Danville Register}, 5 November 1965, B-1.

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.

black vote.\textsuperscript{50} A second question is: if Holton had run as a conservative would he have won? After the election, Carter declared that, if Holton had taken his advice and run as a constitutional conservative, he would have been the governor-elect. Instead, according to Carter, the Conservative Party had “replaced the GOP as the real hope for a true two party system” in Virginia.\textsuperscript{51} He believed that the fact the Conservatives and Republicans received a larger combined vote than the Democrats proved his argument. However, what Carter failed to realize was that Holton, like Godwin, appealed to a wide array of voters, including many blacks. In fact, the Virginia Independent Voters League (VIVL) and the Crusade for Voters declared they represented the majority of black Virginians when they endorsed Godwin, but several black leaders challenged this claim.\textsuperscript{52} If Holton had run as a constitutional conservative, he undoubtedly would have lost any black vote he received. This conclusion is based on the fact that black voters had voted almost unanimously for Johnson against Goldwater in 1964. One anonymous Democratic leader speculated that Godwin would have run stronger if Holton had run with the support of the Conservative Council.\textsuperscript{53}

The biggest question the election raised, however, was whether or not the Conservative party would become a permanent party and affect Virginia politics in the future. In an editorial, the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot expressed concern that the Conservative party’s strong showing would give “some old-line Democratic leaders an

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Petersburg Progress-Index}, 7 November 1965, A-21.

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Danville Register}, 5 November 1965, B-1.

\textsuperscript{52}Buni, \textit{The Negro in Virginia Politics}, 242.

argument to pressure [Godwin] into misreading the returns as a signpost to more of the status quo.”

Godwin, however, rejected the idea that the Conservative Party’s vote would disrupt his plan for progress. He predicted that Story’s supporters would return to the Democratic Party and that the Conservative Party would not become “a principal party on the Virginia scene.” Governor Harrison also discounted the surprise showing of the Conservatives, predicting that “the ill feeling will fade” and that the Conservative Party would “not be a factor in the next gubernatorial election in 1969.”

Contrary to what Godwin, Harrison, and others believed, the Virginia Conservative Party was not dissolving, but actually was buoyed by its strong showing. While their vote total surprised many people, the most surprised were the leaders of the Conservative Party themselves. Story confessed that he “didn’t expect to poll quite so many” and stated that the party “will be seen and heard in future elections.”

Carter proclaimed that the election changed the original concept of the Conservative Council and declared that “We’re through trying to influence either the Republican or Democratic parties - they’re beyond hope. From now on we’re in business for ourselves.” Alex W. McClay, Petersburg chairman of the Conservative Party, hoped the party would become a major political party and echoed Carter’s sentiments that the election would not “mark the end of the Conservative Party.”

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54Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 November 1965, A-4.


56Ibid.


59Petersburg Progress-Index, 5 November 1965, A-1.
"laid a foundation for building a strong statewide organization." The Virginia Conservative Party raised a "Here To Stay" banner and proceeded with already formulated plans to hold a "C-Day" conference in order to discuss the election and relate its experiences to conservative delegates from other states.

The Conservative Party announced that November 6:

will be the day when conservatives will be assured that the success of this political campaign will be the foundation for continued growth of the Conservative Party in Virginia and throughout the nation. This will be the day when representatives from organized and recognized conservative groups across the Nation will be present to give proof that the torch of liberty and the principles of freedom are to be defended and with unified political action in every State in this Nation. This will be C-Day . . . the day the Constitution will be reborn - - for this will be proof that there are Americans determined still that liberty and freedom shall not perish from this earth.61

The party also announced that its immediate plans included finishing organization statewide, discussing options for the 1966 U.S. Senate and House elections, preparing to run candidates in the 1967 General Assembly elections, and "serving as a 'watchdog' on General Assembly members."62 The Conservative Party was not going to disappear.

Supporters saw a real opportunity for the formation of a permanent political organization. That conclusion led directly to the party's actions of 1966, actions which would have a major impact on not only the party's future but also that of the Byrd Organization and Virginia politics in general.

60 Ibid.


62 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 4 and 5 November 1965, A-5.
CHAPTER VII
THE ELECTIONS OF 1966

In 1966 Virginia politics was in a state of flux. The Southside had forsaken the Byrd Organization for the new Virginia Conservative Party in 1965. Liberal elements were becoming an influential force in the state Democratic party, and the state Republican party had finally become a threat to Virginia’s one party system. These factors would make 1966 a most interesting year in Virginia politics. Organization stalwarts, Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., Senator A. Willis Robertson, and Congressman Howard W. Smith faced serious challenges in the Democratic primary in July, raising questions as to whether they could withstand the changing trends in Virginia politics.¹ The most important question, however, was what the Virginia Conservative Party would do about the primary. Would the party support these conservative Organization candidates or decide to nominate candidates of its own for the general election?

Having exceeded expectations in 1965, the party was in a strong position to influence the outcome of the commonwealth’s political contests in 1966. There was much speculation and concern among conservative Democratic politicians as to what the party would do. Finally, on March 17, the executive committee urged the party’s members to refrain from voting in the Democratic primary in July and announced its intention to hold a convention for the purpose of nominating candidates for the U.S.

¹Governor Harrison had appointed Harry F. Byrd, Jr., to replace his father who had resigned in late 1965. In 1966, however, he would have to earn the remaining four years of his father’s term, thus creating an unusual situation in which both U.S. Senate seats were up for contest in the same year.
Senate and House of Representatives.²

On May 21, the Virginia Conservative Party nominated John Carter and F. Lee Hawthorne, a Chesterfield resident and president of an independent labor union, to oppose the winner of the Byrd-Boothe and Robertson-Spong primary races, respectively. Also, in June, the party announced that Edward Silverman would oppose incumbent Watkins Abbitt of the Fourth Congressional District in the general election.³ These actions posed a serious threat to Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt, and also to any other conservative Democrat facing opposition in the primary. If the voters who supported the Conservative ticket in the past gubernatorial election refrained from voting in the primary, moderate and liberal Democrats had a real opportunity for victory, a result that would deal a severe blow to the cause of conservatism not only in Virginia, but also the nation. Why did the Conservative Party, which wanted to advance the cause of conservatism, urge non-participation in the Democratic primary?

Some members of the executive committee desired the formation of a permanent Conservative Party that would attract conservatives from both major parties. They believed that electing Democrats or Republicans, regardless of political philosophy, offered Virginia and the nation “no hope of salvation for constitutional government” and that only the formation of a new party could restore the “greatness and strength” of Virginia and the nation.⁴ By refusing to support Virginia’s conservative incumbent Democratic senators and congressmen in the primary they hoped to persuade these


³Danville Register, 22 May 1966, A-10; Richmond News Leader, 25 June 1966, 1.

politicians to denounce the Democratic Party, join the Conservative Party, and provide the fledgling party the proven political leadership it sorely lacked.

John Carter, the leader of this group, believed that “If these congressmen . . . would take a bold step forward, denounce the party of Lyndon Johnson and Fabian Socialism and come out in the general election as Conservatives . . . they could sweep the state of Virginia and set a new climate for politics in the nation which would give us a chance to cast off the yoke of oppression.” The Virginia Conservative Party sought leadership to “save” the nation and called for conservative political leaders to act as statesmen and “express in their actions what appears to be present in their hearts” and “rather than continue indirectly to further the growth of Fabian socialism in their present political party, let them support proudly their conservative objectives as active members of the Virginia Conservative Party.” Carter and others saw a new party dedicated to the principles on which the United States was founded as the only hope to preserve constitutional conservative government. Since they believed that the Conservative Party represented the only opportunity to “save” Virginia and the nation, they opposed conservatives’ participation in the Democratic primary as surrendering this opportunity. In order to prevent the destruction of their party, they told supporters that voting in the primary was “a vote in the support of Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, and [Secretary of Agriculture] Orville Freeman and their welfare programs.” Significantly, they also

5John W. Carter to Mary Gibbs, 8 January 1966, Carter Papers.
8Richmond Times-Dispatch, 7 July 1966, A-4.
emphasized the illegality of members of the Conservative Party voting in the primary.

Section 24-367 of the Code of Virginia stated that:

No person shall be permitted to vote for the candidates of any party in any primary unless such person is a member of such party and in the last preceding general election, in which such person participated, he or she voted for the nominees of such party; and, upon challenge, such person shall declare on oath that he or she is a member of such party and supported such nominees as hereinbefore required before being permitted to vote.

A party that had as its campaign slogan “Liberty Under Law” could not very well encourage its members to break the law. J. R. Orgain, Jr., declared to Alexander Hudgins, chairman of the executive committee, that “a law is a law that is not to be broken, one who breaks the law is a criminal, who is to be convicted and punished for his act.” He suggested that the Conservative Party demand election officials enforce the law and challenge every voter.9 The pronouncements of the executive committee and its attempts to dissuade party members from entering the primary by emphasizing legal technicalities or grouping Senator Byrd, Jr., Senator Robertson, and other conservative Democratic congressmen with Lyndon Baines Johnson and the liberals in the Virginia Democratic Party infuriated conservatives throughout the state.

Editorial opinion was decidedly opposed to the actions of the executive committee. The Richmond News Leader wondered what the party intended to accomplish by opposing conservative Democrats who had proven their conservatism with their voting records and declared that “plainly it is not the election of Conservative candidates for public office.”10 The Richmond Times-Dispatch called the Conservative

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Party's accusation that Byrd, Robertson, Smith, Abbitt, Tuck, and Satterfield "lend dignity to the Marxist Democratic Party" ridiculous and believed that if it continued with its plans for a nominating convention, the result would have "dire consequences to the very cause they profess to support." The Southwest Virginia Enterprise believed that the Conservative Party's "unswerving intent to nominate candidates (which they surely must know will not win) is dealing a serious blow to the cause of conservatism in the Old Dominion." The Halifax Record-Adviser which endorsed the Conservative ticket in 1965 could not understand the rationale behind the executive committee's decision and believed that the "result could very well be the nomination of Armistead L. Boothe and William B. Spong, Jr., a pair of liberals who would fit nicely into the Great Society." Virginia's editors were not alone in denouncing the actions of the executive committee and, in fact, they were subdued compared to the attacks by some members of the Conservative Party.

Dissenting party members argued that the executive committee's actions did not represent the attitude of the entire party and contradicted the party's first priority: to insure the election of conservatives regardless of party. Only in the absence of a conservative choice should the party nominate a candidate. Moreover, they were concerned with how the decision would affect the party's existence as an influential voting bloc that could offset the growing strength of the liberal, labor and African-

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11*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 3 April 1966, B-12.

12*Southwest Virginia Enterprise*, n.d., Box 118, Folder 3, A. Willis Robertson Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia. Hereafter cited as Robertson Papers.

American voter blocs. W. W. Whitlock, vice-chairman of the Louisa County chapter, had found no support for nominating candidates in the Richmond, Charlottesville, Orange, Spotsylvania, Hanover, and Louisa County areas and expressed surprise that the executive committee would come to such a decision without consulting active members of the party. He was convinced that these actions would forfeit the party’s effectiveness and destroy it.\textsuperscript{14} Fred M. Davis, treasurer of the Lynchburg chapter, declared the actions “a monumental blunder” and stated that the executive committee seemed “more interested in promoting the Party rather than the cause of conservatism which has had its fine examples in Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr., and A. Willis Robertson whose record of 98\% conservative based upon 98 Roll Calls is the highest among the senators.”\textsuperscript{15} Jerry J. Jewett of Chesterfield, secretary of the Conservative Party’s Third District executive committee, publicly announced that he totally disagreed “with the effort to list” Byrd and Robertson as liberals and believed “that most conservative Virginians will do all they can to elect both men.”\textsuperscript{16} These Conservatives, however, were subdued in their denunciation compared to Richard T. Short, a founder of the Conservative Party and a member of the executive committee.

Short communicated to the executive committee his:

disappointment that certain chiefs in the Virginia Conservative Party have decided that Virginia’s representation in the United States Senate and the House of Representatives is not to their liking, so they will consequently

\textsuperscript{14}W. W. Whitlock to Alexander Hudgins, 23 March 1966, Box 118, Folder 7, Robertson Papers; W.W. Whitlock to Alexander Hudgins, 6 April 1966, ibid; W.W. Whitlock to Thomas B. Phillips, Jr., 2 May 1966, ibid.


\textsuperscript{16}Richmond Times-Dispatch, 3 April 1966, B-12.
field candidates in the coming election. This was no surprise to me, as I have noted that these chiefs have a chronic disease of 'Partyitis,' which is precisely what they condemned the Republicans and Democrats for in the last gubernatorial campaign. It is a tragedy that such a young party, made up of voters who had little previous political experience and were fighting for certain principles and ideals that they believed in, should be betrayed so quickly by ambitious politicians seeking their own personal engrandisement (sic). It is pure stupidity that the Conservative Party should even think of opposing Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr., or Senator A. Willis Robertson, or the Honorable Watkins Abbitt, Bill Tuck, Dave Satterfield, Howard Smith, Jack Marsh, etc. It was my hope that The Virginia Conservative Party would grow and would prove a decisive factor in state elections with as much, if not more, influence, than the Labor, Negro and ultra-liberal blocks (sic). It was well on its way... Now this political power has slit its own throat by turning its back on the men who stand for the principles that gave cause for the birth of the party. Perhaps the rank and file of the Virginia Conservative Party will speak up at the May convention and endorse Harry F. Byrd, Jr., and A. Willis Robertson, and ask the true conservative voters of Virginia to forgive them of their blunder.17

Despite opposition to the executive committee's decision, the Virginia Conservative Party proceeded with plans to nominate candidates. In fact, not only did the party proceed with plans to oppose Byrd and Robertson, but it announced its intentions to oppose Watkins Abbitt in the Fourth Congressional District.

At a meeting in early May, members of the Fourth District Conservative Party committee unanimously adopted a resolution that asked Abbitt to resign as chairman of the state Democratic Party, renounce the Democratic Party, and run as either an independent or a Conservative in the general election.18 Conservative Party leaders believed that without their support Abbitt would lose in the primary against Lewis Curlin

17Richard T. Short to Executive Committee, Virginia Conservative Party, 29 March 1966, Box 118, Folder 4, Robertson Papers.

of Chesapeake, a candidate supported by African-American and civil rights groups. On May 14, Conservative Party leaders presented the resolution to Abbitt during a closed meeting at his office in Appomattox and gave him until May 21 to announce his decision. Abbitt, however, announced his decision the afternoon of the meeting, stating that he would remain in the Democratic Party and work towards guiding "it in a proper direction." He declined the invitation because he did not believe he was any less conservative than the men presenting the resolution, and that by becoming an independent he could lose his seniority on the important subcommittees that benefitted the Fourth District. With Abbitt's refusal, the stage was set for the Virginia Conservative Party to nominate candidates for the general election.

On May 21, with over four hundred delegates present, the party held its state convention in Richmond. This convention, in contrast to the nominating convention of 1965, produced dissension among the ranks over the issue of nominating candidates immediately or waiting until after the Democratic primary. Whitlock requested that the convention consider a resolution that the Louisa County Conservative Committee adopted. The resolution declared, in part, that since the party's primary objective was to promote constitutional conservatism on all levels of government and support candidates, regardless of party affiliation, who espouse conservative ideals, the convention should recess until after the Democratic primary and then determine if the Virginia Conservative

19Blackstone Courier-Record, 12 May 1966, 1.
Party should take further action. Marian Rawls proposed that the convention endorse Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt, or “otherwise conservatives will be fighting conservatives.” The vast majority of the delegates, however, did not accept these proposals.

By a vote of 331 to 14, the convention nominated John Carter and F. Lee Hawthorne for the U.S. Senate. Carter would oppose the winner of the Byrd-Boothe primary and Hawthorne would face the victor of the Robertson-Spong race. The convention also adopted a platform which called for the party to enter candidates for every political office, expressed abhorrence with the welfare state, promised to reduce the size of government, denounced the influence of the United Nations on U.S. foreign policy, promised to take the power of lawmaking away from federal judges and return it to the people and the states, and pledged to return to parents the right to educate their children without federal intrusion. In addition to nominating candidates and adopting a platform, the convention also announced a reorganization of the party with a State Central Committee replacing the Executive Committee as the party’s governing body.

The State Central Committee would consist of four members from each of the ten congressional district committees, who in turn would elect a chairman, a first, second, and third vice-chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer. The officers elected were Reid T. Putney, State Chairman; Thomas B. Phillips Jr., First Vice-Chairman; Kent Loving,

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25 Ibid.
Second Vice-Chairman; Hatcher P. Story, Third Vice-Chairman; Oscar Payne, Secretary; E. R. Jelsma, Treasurer. While the convention nominated candidates for the U.S. Senate, the party waited until June to nominate a candidate to oppose Watkins Abbitt. At a meeting in Petersburg in mid-June, the party secretly nominated a candidate to run in the Fourth District. Finally, on June 25, the party announced that Edward Silverman, a founder of the party and one of its guiding lights, would oppose Abbitt in the general election.

The Conservative Party’s decision not to support Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt was paradoxical. Carter stated that he had no quarrel with Robertson’s voting record, while Silverman, in announcing his candidacy, called Abbitt a “fine man.” Why did the Conservative Party find such proven conservatives as Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt so unacceptable? The primary reason was the fact that they remained Democrats. Carter frankly admitted during the nominating convention that if Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt would denounce the Democratic Party, the Conservative Party would “follow them to the gates of hell.” He declared that since these politicians did not desert the “foul and filthy” Democratic Party, they did not deserve Conservative support. The Conservatives believed that Virginia’s Democratic congressmen bestowed “dignity” upon the “Marxist

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26 *Farmville Herald*, 27 May 1966, A-11. The reorganization of the party’s command structure stemmed, in part, from the fact that Alexander Hudgins, the chairman of the executive committee, advocated a wait and see approach to the Democratic primary. Before the convention, he resigned from the party, but paid to attend as an observer. *(Richmond News Leader*, 21 May 1966, 1.)


Democrat Party by either pledging loyalty to the national party or by maintaining ‘golden silence.’”\textsuperscript{30} By not renouncing the Democratic Party, Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt gave the Conservative Party the impression that they approved of the Johnson administration and its “Great Society.”\textsuperscript{31}

Abbitt further infuriated Conservatives because he remained Virginia’s Democratic Party chairman.\textsuperscript{32} One Conservative refuted the notion that it was irresponsible to link Abbitt with Johnson, accusing him, as state Democratic chairman, of being Johnson’s “right hand, chief man” in Virginia and approving the “insulting-to-Liberty Lady Bird Special.”\textsuperscript{33} According to Story, by not leaving the Democratic Party and giving Conservatives “the sure knowledge that they were not supporting” the Johnson Democratic Party, “Abbitt “clearly joined all the forces of that party that have placed and are placing such a burden on the people of the Fourth District.”\textsuperscript{34} The Conservative Party also made much of the fact that Byrd, Jr., and Robertson had received the endorsement of Sidney Kellam, and had met with Moses Riddick and other leaders of the VIVL.\textsuperscript{35}

The Conservative Party considered Kellam’s endorsement tantamount to making a


\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Petersburg Progress-Index}, 18 October 1966, A-8.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Farmville Herald}, 28 October 1966, B-1.

deal with the Johnson Administration and perceived the meeting with the VIVL as a solicitation of the African-American vote. On January 17, 1966, the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* reported that Byrd and Robertson had met with leaders of the VIVL after the Godwin inauguration and asked their support for the upcoming elections.\(^{36}\) The Conservative Party construed this news as an indication that Byrd and Robertson had subverted their conservative principles for the sake of political expediency. Carter declared that conservatives should be “wary when we see Virginia’s two senators undertaking to perform the Godwin miracle of being all things to all people - of clammering to get into the suite of Mose (sic) Riddick’s Independent Voters League.”\(^{37}\) Another Conservative expressed incredulity that Robertson would solicit the African-American vote since “we have seen and heard the negroes state they brought you and Little Harry to your knees.”\(^{38}\) Although Robertson replied that he “made the courtesy call as indicated not to be discourteous to a group of voters and taxpayers” and did “not ask a single one in that group to vote for me,”\(^{39}\) the meeting was enough to convince a substantial number of Conservatives to refrain from voting in the primary. By urging its members not to vote in the Democratic primary and nominating its own candidates for the general election, the Virginia Conservative Party made clear its intention not to support Virginia’s incumbent conservative Democratic congressmen. These incumbents, therefore, worked to blunt the threat of the Virginia Conservative Party.


\(^{38}\) Frank T. Burgess to A. Willis Robertson, 10 February 1966, Box 118, Folder 1, Robertson Papers.

\(^{39}\) A. Willis Robertson to Frank T. Burgess, 10 February 1966, ibid.
With Boothe and Spong enjoying support from moderate and liberal Democrats, African-Americans and labor groups, Byrd and Robertson realized that they could ill afford to lose conservative votes. They both considered a large voter turnout as the key to their success. Byrd stated that, “If a large number turn out, we’ll be all right,” while Robertson opined that their success hinged on “getting the conservatives to the polls.” Other than urging a large voter turnout, however, Byrd gave no indication that he was worried about the Conservative Party’s impact on the primary. Political writer George Kelley of the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* wrote that the Byrd campaign “has been one of the smoothest, impressive shows in any recent primary involving serious opposition.” Kelley concluded that the Byrd Organization campaigners were primarily working for Byrd “rather than Robertson.”

In contrast, Robertson realized that he was in serious trouble and tried every tactic to garner support. Robertson’s supporters quietly solicited the aid of Moses Riddick, but when the VIVL convention “rudely overturned” Riddick and endorsed Spong, he cloaked his campaign in conservatism to win the rural conservative vote. His campaign began distributing mailings that publicized Spong’s endorsements from black voter groups. Edward Willey, the campaign manager, hinted that the mailings were intended to lure Conservative Party supporters into the primary. Without Conservative support,

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40*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 3 July 1966, B-4; A. Willis Robertson to James E. Davis, 22 June 1966, Box 118, Folder 9, Robertson Papers.

41*Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, 10 July 1966, C-5.


Robertson considered his days in office "numbered."\textsuperscript{44}

The Conservative Party also threatened the reelection of Congressman Howard W. Smith of the Eighth District. According to Smith's biographer, Bruce J. Dierenfield, the Conservative Party's call to its supporters to refrain from voting in the Democratic primary "further clouded Smith's hopes for reelection" in an already close campaign.\textsuperscript{45} Redistricting had subtracted rural areas and added urban areas to his congressional district, thereby, not only increasing, but also liberalizing the electorate. If members of the Conservative Party refrained from voting in the primary, Smith knew that liberal elements could very well nominate his opponent, liberal George Rawlings. He believed that the "failure of conservatives to vote" would "be a serious handicap to conservative candidates." Hoping Conservatives would enter the Democratic primary, Smith assured them that it was "improbable that there will be any effort to exclude them."\textsuperscript{46} While Byrd, Robertson, and Smith worked to return the Conservatives to the fold, their opponents sought to keep them out of the primary.

Spong's campaign manager, William C. Battle, was worried that a recent Godwin announcement concerning the impact of the Conservative Party on the election would "be taken as an invitation by [Godwin] to the Conservatives who bolted the party last time to

\textsuperscript{44}A. Willis Robertson to James E. Davis, 22 June 1966, Box 118, Folder 9, Robertson Papers.


\textsuperscript{46}Howard W. Smith to W. M. Foster, 31 May 1966, Box 205, Louisa County Folder, Howard W. Smith Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. Smith was referring to the legality of Conservative Party members voting in the primary.
return to the Democratic Primary.”

Armistead Boothe charged Byrd with “encouraging people to violate the law by refusing to say that people other than Democrats should stay out of the Democratic primary.”

State Senator Edward Breeden, a staunch supporter of both Spong and Boothe, requested the Attorney General to rule whether voters who did not vote for Godwin last year could participate in the Democratic primary.

He also suggested that a “group of able non-political lawyers . . . be asked to issue a joint opinion pointing out that such unqualified participants would run the risk of being guilty of a misdemeanor.” Breeden believed that keeping Conservative Party members out of the primary “might well be the margin of victory.”

Even the Republican party refused to bail out the conservative Democrats as it had in the past. Arthur S. Brinkley, Jr., chairman of the Third District Republican Party, urged Republicans to stay home, and declared that a vote for any Democrat in the primary was a “vote for the ‘Big Brother Society’ of Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, and Bobby Kennedy.”

On primary day, July 12, Virginia politics was turned upside down. Byrd was victorious against Boothe, but by only the slim margin of 8,225 votes, a margin uncharacteristic for a Byrd running for political office in Virginia. Spong defeated Robertson by only 611 votes, while Rawlings defeated Smith by only 645 votes. While

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49 *Farmville Herald*, 20 May 1966, B-1.

50 Edward L. Breeden, Jr., to Michael B. Wagenheim, 30 June 1966, Box 8, Correspondence “B” Folder, Armistead L. Boothe Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

other factors played a role in Smith's and Robertson's defeat, such as their age, apathy among conservative Democrats who never dreamed they would be defeated, the expanded electorate, and, in Smith's case, redistricting, the Virginia Conservative Party was the deciding factor. Although it is impossible to determine the exact number of Conservatives who refrained from voting, analysts estimated the number as between 15,000 and 30,000. These numbers far exceeded the small margin by which Robertson and Smith lost. Since it was inconceivable that Rawlings or Spong would have received any of those votes, there is no doubt that the incumbents would have been re-elected if members of the Conservative Party had participated in sufficient numbers. By its stand against party members participating in the Democratic primary, the Conservative Party indirectly helped mark the end of the Byrd Organization as the dominant force in Virginia politics, a political organization that had for decades nurtured the same conservative philosophy that the Conservative Party now espoused.

Having concluded the primary, the candidates prepared for the general election. Virginia's Republican Party, at its convention in May, had chosen Lawrence M. Traylor and James P. Ould, Jr., to oppose the winner of the Byrd-Boothe and Robertson-Spong primary races, respectively. The party also nominated William L. Scott, a conservative Republican, to oppose George C. Rawlings, Jr., in the Eighth District, but did not offer

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52 Senator Harry F. Byrd, Sr.'s illness during the campaign emphasized Smith and Robertson's advanced age.

opposition to Watkins M. Abbitt. The presence of the Conservative candidates, Carter, Hawthorne, and Silverman, enlivened what otherwise was an uninspiring campaign. They addressed the same issues as in 1965 and stridently attacked their opponents.

In a speech at Farmville, Carter spoke of the communist agitation of the black population and outlined the impact of communist influences on the civil rights movement. As evidence, he read excerpts from pamphlets distributed by known communist organizations during the 1920's and 1930's, discussed an expose entitled, Color, Communism, and Common Sense, written by Manning Johnson, and listed known communist organizations associated with civil rights organizations, including the Southern Conference Education Fund and the National Lawyer's Guild. Carter declared that a communist revolution was raging throughout the nation with the “full blessing” of politicians and urged Virginia's congressional representatives to “demand an immediate investigation.” As in 1965, the Conservative Party blamed the Johnson Administration and the politicians for advocating policies that encouraged this “communist revolution.”

Carter called the Great Society “communist inspired” and declared that Johnson's administration had adopted many of the goals the Communist Party had listed in its legislative program in 1928, including social security, Medicare, civil rights laws and

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54 The Conservative Party entertained the idea of nominating a candidate in the Eighth District, but Reid Putney of Goochland County refused to run. (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 15 July 1966, A-8)

55 This was the same Manning Johnson who was a professional witness for the HUAC and its state equivalents during the 1950's.

“heavily graduated income taxes.” He declared that “Congressmen are sitting around up there in Washington, fat, dumb, and happy, with their government shot through with Communist agents and Soviet sympathizers,” while the Democratic and Republican parties “are just full of politicians sitting around preserving their own careers while Rome is burning and Lyndon Baines Johnson is playing Nero.” Silverman denounced the “War on Poverty” as “the biggest fake to buy votes of bloc groups with earnings of the honest tax-paying public.” Carter urged the Conservative candidates to seek the black vote, stating that, “It’s about time that someone undertakes to make an appeal to the Negro on a basis of patriotism and common sense rather than trying to buy him with welfare benefits.” Hawthorne assailed the Department of Justice for making “the criminal a first-class citizen in Johnson's Great Society,” while “the law abiding citizen has become a second-class citizen.”

The Conservatives also condemned the activities of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). The attacks on HEW were indicative of the Conservative Party's disdain for forced integration. The party was more vocal in its denunciations of HEW in this campaign than in 1965 as result of the department's recent demands that Southside localities begin submitting plans for desegregation as a


58 *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 27 October 1966, B-6.


61 Ibid., 2 November 1966, B-2.
prerequisite for obtaining federal funds. Silverman referred to the department as “P-HEW” and declared that “Virginians never voted or agreed to sell their children for federal funds.” He believed children, black and white, were “being used in a great experiment of racial amalgamation” and called for the removal of “our school system from the shackles of slavery imposed by HEW.”

Aside from addressing domestic issues, the Conservatives also voiced opposition to Johnson’s policy in Vietnam. Silverman declared that, “we owe it to our fighting men that they receive the best weapons we can offer to end the war right now, or bring them home.” Moreover, he asserted that, “We are not going to win in Viet Nam until we get the United Nations out of the United States.” Hawthorne demanded the Vietnam policy change “to a win-policy” and advocated the use of nuclear weapons if it would accomplish victory.

In addition to denouncing the policies of the Johnson administration, the Conservative candidates spent a considerable time attacking their opponents. Carter and Hawthorne denounced their opponents most strenuously for refusing to debate. When the Richmond Jaycees sponsored a “Senatorial Candidates Night” in October neither of the Conservative Party candidates were invited, prompting party workers at the event to protest with cries that, “We were unfairly uninvited.” The Conservative Party wanted

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64 Petersburg Progress-Index, 21 September 1966, A-14.


66 Ibid., 19 October 1966, A-1.
their opponents to "give frank and honest answers" as to "where they stand on the
takeover of our school system . . . on the poverty program which is inflating our currency
and making politicians rich and fat . . . on the issue of the repeal of 14b of the [Taft-
Hartley] Act which gives a man the right not to belong to a labor organization . . . on the
appointment of Federal Judges whose decisions have been largely responsible for the
crime wave in America today." Carter called his and Hawthorne's opponents "four
spineless jellyfish" for refusing to debate. Reid Putney declared that the "Democrats
have used the feeble excuse that they could not fit such a debate in their busy schedule,
and the Republicans have used the childish excuse they would not appear if the
Democrats would not appear. Are they afraid to meet the Virginia Conservative Party
candidates? If they are not then we would suggest that they come forward to defend the
Great Society whether it be Republican and Democrat administered."

The Conservative Party also attacked their opponents for a variety of other
reasons. When Republican Ould labeled the Conservative Party platform reactionary,
Carter said that "if he finds it reactionary he must agree with LBJ" because "every plank
in that platform is aimed at LBJ and his Great Society." Carter considered the
Conservative Party "a resurrection of Americanism," rather than "a part of the white
backlash." Spong was attacked as a liberal Democrat and ally of President Johnson.

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69 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 16 October 1966, B-5.
Voting for Spong, according to Carter, would be a big “favor” for President Johnson and also be a vote “for riots in the streets . . . for a breakdown of law and order.”

Byrd and Abbitt, however, received the brunt of the Conservatives’ rhetorical blasts. The Conservative Party attacked Byrd for allegedly merging his campaign with Spong’s, helping kick off Pat Jennings’ campaign at a political rally in Hungry Mother State Park, appearing with the labor leaders of the United Mine Workers in Hopewell, and abandoning Robertson during the primary. The Conservative Party publicized Byrd’s activities during the campaign as evidence that he was not a true conservative. Hawthorne called Byrd a liberal for collaborating with the senior Byrd’s enemies, while Carter considered it “strange” that Byrd, who had proclaimed himself a “forward-looking conservative,” would consort with “out left liberals who fought his father tooth and nail.”

The Conservative Party also attacked Watkins Abbitt for similar reasons. Silverman declared that Abbitt “qualified for the new liberal label for his support of” Spong and “proudly parade[d] under the new liberal banner of the Virginia Democratic

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Party” after his meeting with the labor leaders of the United Mine Workers at Hopewell. He also attacked Abbitt for not speaking out early enough when it came to the “War on Poverty” and the activities of HEW. “If he really represented the 4th District,” Silverman declared, Abbitt “would have spoken out against the vote buying Poverty Program 11 months ago – not 35 days before the election” and “he would not have waited until 34 days before the election to criticize Harold Howe,” head of the office of Education in HEW.

Despite the vitriolic attacks, Byrd and Abbitt virtually ignored their Conservative opponents. Byrd made no pronouncement attacking or even acknowledging the Conservative Party, and recalled years later that he was never worried about it. According to political analyst, James Latimer, the Republicans posed something of a threat to Byrd because Carter was running. In early October, they decided to increase their efforts against Byrd, a decision prompted at least in part by Carter’s presence on the ballot. Latimer cited “the possibility that the segregationist ‘backlash vote’ would go strongly to Carter and away from Byrd.” Having no Republican opposition, Abbitt was not the object of such a strategy.

Abbitt understood Silverman’s appeal in the staunchly conservative Fourth District and took the threat seriously. He never publicly attacked the Conservative Party,

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77 Harry F. Byrd, Jr., interview by author, 15 October 1997, Winchester, Virginia.

but campaigned more vigorously in this election than in previous ones. When one
supporter suggested that he play up "the point regarding the Conservatives approaching
[him] to run," Abbitt heeded the advice.\textsuperscript{79} He made much of the fact that the
Conservative Party had asked him to be their candidate "without asking [him] to change
[his] political philosophy."\textsuperscript{80} Another supporter suggested that he "get in the grapevine
that Silverman is a candidate of the KKK," and Abbitt replied that "I am following that
suggestion to the letter."\textsuperscript{81} In early November the press asked Silverman about his
connections with the Ku Klux Klan. He refused to criticize or condemn the group and
simply stated that he had attended some of its meetings to cover them as a reporter for the
\textbf{Blackstone Courier-Record}.\textsuperscript{82}

Notwithstanding their intensity, the Conservatives' attacks on Byrd and Abbitt did
not have the effect the party had hoped. The relentless attacks infuriated many
conservatives. In early 1966 the party lost many supporters, who undoubtedly, wondered,
as Richard T. Short did, "how in the hell can you get more conservative than Harry
Byrd?"\textsuperscript{83} Immediately after the primary, one former supporter, Jerry J. Jewett, began
planning a write-in campaign for William Tuck, considering him "the best qualified
Virginian to represent us in the [United States] Senate." He considered Spong too liberal,

\textsuperscript{79}Garland Spain to Watkins M. Abbitt, 25 September 1966, Box 2, Petersburg
City Folder, Abbitt Papers.

\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch}, 9 November 1966, A-4.

\textsuperscript{81}J. C. Jenkins to Watkins M. Abbitt, 10 October 1966, Box 1, Isle of Wight
Folder, Abbitt Papers; Watkins M. Abbitt to J.C. Jenkins, 11 October 1966, ibid.

\textsuperscript{82}\textit{Norfolk Ledger-Star}, 1 November 1966, A-9.

\textsuperscript{83}Richard T. Short interview.
and realized that he would win in a three-way race. Jewett called for backing Tuck and asked Silverman to quit the race and support Byrd and Abbitt “as the best in line to continue conservatism in Virginia.”

Although Jewett’s campaign for Tuck might have hurt Spong much more than Hawthorne, the Conservative Party expressed serious concern. Silverman charged that the write-in campaign was an effort to oppose Hawthorne in his home county of Chesterfield and declared that “Two can play the game that Mr. Jewett is trying to play.” The Conservative Party threatened to conduct its own write-in campaign or support Tuck’s Republican opponent, Robert L. Gilliam. Tuck, facing a Republican opponent for only the third time in his many years of service, did not wish to attract the ire of the Conservative Party. He had remained unscathed from the Conservative Party’s wrath, although like Byrd, Abbitt, and Robertson, he remained a Democrat. Tuck disavowed the write-in campaign, and Jewett, respecting his wishes, abandoned the effort.

Jewett’s write-in campaign was not the only indication of the Conservative Party’s waning support. In 1965, the Prince Edward County Citizens for Conservative Government had supported the Conservative Party. This time, however, the group endorsed Byrd, Jr., Abbitt, and Ould, and pledged to work actively on their behalf. They supported Byrd and Abbitt as defenders of constitutional government and Ould for

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84Petersburg Progress-Index, 19 October 1966, A-9.


When asked years later by the author why the Conservative Party never offered opposition to Tuck, Carter stated that Tuck was more vocal in denouncing the Johnson Administration, and was “a close, personal friend of mine.” (John W. Carter interview, 23 October 1997.)
standing for the group's "basic principles." Carter criticized the endorsement and challenged the group's "conservatism." The *Farmville Herald* which had praised the Conservative Party's principles in 1965 decided to endorse Byrd, Spong, and Abbitt. The editorial declared its unswerving support for Byrd and Abbitt, but was "less enthusiastic" about Spong. Ould, however, was considered "even more liberal" than Spong, and Hawthorne too inexperienced.

Another development that revealed the Conservative Party's diminishing strength in the Southside was Circuit Court Judge D. Carleton Mayes' ruling that the courthouses in the 4th District could not be used for political rallies. The Conservative Party relied heavily on courthouse rallies and Silverman charged that the Conservative Party was the first political organization denied use of the courthouses. He called the ruling "judicial tyranny" and threatened to eliminate "the appointive power of Democrats that set this up." To offset the blow, the Conservative Party announced the beginning of "Operation Door Knock," a plan by which party workers would go door to door to push the Conservative candidates.

The final, and most conclusive, indication that the Conservative Party had lost support were the results of the general election. On 8 November, over 730,000 Virginians visited the polls, a record number for a non-presidential election year, and

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89 Ibid., 18 October 1966, A-4.


overwhelmingly voted for Byrd and Spong. Abbitt was reelected easily in the Fourth District. Byrd and Spong won by a large margin over their Republican and Conservative opponents, amassing, respectively, 389,028 (53.3 per cent) and 429,855 (58.6 per cent) votes. Traylor and Ould captured the customary percentage of the vote for Republican candidates in a statewide race, receiving, respectively, 272,804 (37.4 per cent) and 245,681 (33.5 per cent) votes. Carter and Hawthorne ran a distant third with only 57,692 (7.9 per cent) and 58,251 (7.9 per cent) votes, respectively. Although voter turnout increased substantially, Carter and Hawthorne garnered over 22,000 votes less than the party received in the gubernatorial election a year earlier. They ran strongest in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Districts, but failed to win any county or city. Hawthorne placed second in twelve counties and one city, while Carter placed second in only five counties and one city. The difference between Hawthorne and Carter’s vote total can be attributed to the fact that Spong was a moderate-liberal Democrat, while Byrd was a proven conservative. According to Ralph Eisenberg, the only impact the Conservative Party had on the general election was “to deny Democratic majorities in the few counties where Democratic pluralities occurred and to provide the scattering of votes which made

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92Eisenberg, *Virginia Votes*, 249-256.

93In the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Districts, Carter received 9,084, 11,699 and 11,045 votes, respectively, while Hawthorne garnered 9,165, 12,387, 9,324 votes. *(Richmond Times-Dispatch, 10 November 1966, A-4.)*

Republican pluralities possible in seven counties.\textsuperscript{95}

The Conservative Party also did not fare well in the Fourth District congressional race. Watkins Abbitt trounced Edward Silverman by over 30,000 votes.\textsuperscript{96} The Conservative Party had expected a stronger showing, but the write-in candidacy of Samuel W. Tucker, an African-American lawyer and civil rights activist, "overshadowed" the "white backlash" on which the party hoped to capitalize.\textsuperscript{97} The general election results revealed the weakness of the Virginia Conservative Party throughout the state, even in the area of its greatest strength, the Southside. In comparison to the gubernatorial election results of 1965, Carter, Hawthorne, and Silverman's showing in 1966 was disastrous.

The Conservative Party entered 1966 in a strong position to influence Virginia politics, but did so in a paradoxical manner by contributing to the defeat of conservative stalwarts, Senator Robertson and Congressman Smith, in the primary and thereby contributing to the demise of the Byrd Organization. By these actions, the party alienated a large number of conservatives, thereby hastening its own demise. By the end of 1966, it was clear that the Conservative Party would not continue to be a major influence in Virginia politics. The party, however, was far from dead and would play a significant role in George Wallace's presidential campaign of 1968.


\textsuperscript{96}Blackstone Courier-Record, 10 November 1966, 3. Abbitt garnered 42,966 votes, while Silverman received 14,078.

\textsuperscript{97}Richmond Times-Dispatch, 9 November 1966, A-4.
The Virginia Conservative Party began 1967 badly wounded, but not yet dead. In November 1966, Putney had warned that the party would be “offering candidates for all constitutional offices” in 1967 and “trying to defeat Democratic officeholders at the county and city level in a large part of the state next year.” His warning was not an idle threat, as the party ran candidates for the State Senate, House of Delegates, and a host of local offices in primarily Tidewater, the Southside, and Greater Richmond.

From Tidewater, William I. McKendree of Norfolk, a co-founder of the party and Second District chairman, became the first Conservative to announce his candidacy. In mid-November 1966, from the steps of the Douglas MacArthur Memorial in downtown Norfolk, McKendree announced his intention to oppose Henry Howell for his seat in the State Senate in 1967. He ran on a platform that called for the reduction of taxes, support of law and order, protection of property rights, return of school systems to the localities, and freedom of association. Also, he pledged to fight against open housing laws and federal intrusion in local affairs and “resist the efforts of the Equal Opportunities Commission to invade the rights of labor unions, fraternal organizations and others in their choice of whom they shall admit to membership” and “the coercion of employers in

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1Richmond Times-Dispatch, 4 November 1966, B-11.

2Greater Richmond included the city of Richmond and the counties of Henrico and Chesterfield.

3Richmond Times-Dispatch, 17 November 1966, B-4.
hiring without regard for ability to perform in the increase of business." Other
Conservative candidates from Tidewater Virginia were Francis Hooper of Newport News
and Joseph P. Campbell of Chesapeake, both running for the House of Delegates.5

In the Greater Richmond area, the party ran six candidates for the House of
Delegates, Sheriff, Board of Supervisors, and Justice of the Peace. The Richmond-
Henrico County Conservative Party nominated Reverend Beverly B. McDowell and
George Burruss, Jr., both of Richmond, to run for the House of Delegates.6 McDowell
worked full-time on his and Burruss' campaign through the summer and into the fall so as
to create an "organizational campaign apparatus" that would effectively manage their
campaign after he returned to his job as Headmaster of Bermuda Academy.7 The
Chesterfield County Conservative Party nominated Beverly Davis for the Board of
Supervisors to represent the Midlothian District, Phillip Stargardt for sheriff, and R.C.
Moates and James R. Setzer for justices of the peace.8

The Conservative Party remained most active in the Southside, nominating ten
candidates for state and local offices. Three Conservatives offered themselves as
candidates for the House of Delegates. Samuel F. Sanger of Nottoway sought to
represent Nottoway, Lunenburg, and Amelia counties, William "Bill" Barrett, chairman

5Virginia Conservative Party Newsletter, 15 June and 15 July 1967, 1, Carter
Papers.
6Ibid.
7Ibid., 28 August 1967, 1, ibid.
8Ibid., 15 July 1967, 1, ibid.
of the Isle of Wight Conservative Party, hoped to represent Southampton and Isle of
Wight counties and the city of Franklin, and Oscar Payne of Danville, the party's State
Secretary, ran to represent the city of Danville and Pittsylvania County. In Lunenburg
County, the party presented four candidates for election to the County Board of
Supervisors: E.V. Atkins, Bill Smith, Rudy Johnson to represent the Plymouth District,
and Lewis Tucker to represent the Lewiston District. Also, Andrew P. Johnston ran to
represent the Randolph district on the Cumberland County Board of Supervisors, and,
Walter Moseley campaigned for a position on the Brunswick County Board of
Supervisors. In addition to these candidates, Russell Darden ran for Commissioner of the
Revenue in Southampton County.10

Other Conservative candidates running for the House of Delegates were Wayne
M. Myers, chairman of the Amherst County Conservative Party and member of the party's
State Central Committee, and John C. Shaw, a Richmond businessman and chairman of
the Hanover County Conservative Party.11 Shaw ran against Democratic incumbent,
Robert A. Gwathmey to represent King William and Hanover counties and, during the
campaign, complained that the General Assembly was “overcrowded with lawyers.” He
ran on a platform that called for “increased teachers’ salaries, free textbooks for
elementary school children, a voting age of 18, and exclusion from the sales tax of
necessary items for retired persons and social security dependents.”12

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9Ibid., 15 July and 28 August 1967, 1, ibid.
10Ibid., September 1967, 2, ibid.
11Ibid., 28 August 1967, 1, ibid.
The Conservative Party succeeded in electing only two of these candidates in 1967: E.V. Atkins to the Lunenburg County Board of Supervisors, and C.F. Callis, chairman of the Lunenburg County Conservative Party, as Justice of the Peace.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to running candidates for state and local offices in 1967, the party prepared to play an active role in the 1968 presidential election. On 16 September 1967, at the Holiday Inn in Petersburg, Virginia, the party held its third state convention for the purpose of accomplishing two objectives: to present the Conservative candidates running for office in 1967 and assure George Wallace, the former Governor of Alabama, a "ballot position" in Virginia for his unannounced presidential candidacy.\textsuperscript{14} The convention's 230 delegates, representing thirty-seven localities, unanimously nominated Wallace and Republican Governor, Ronald Reagan of California, respectively, for President and Vice-President.\textsuperscript{15} Wallace was labeled a "renegade Democrat" and was expected to leave the Democratic Party at any time to announce an independent bid for the presidency. Although Reagan had not given any indication that he would leave the Republican Party and was expected to vie for his party's nomination in 1968, the Conservative Party selected him "on the basis of his conservative performance since being elected" governor of California. However, in case further action regarding Reagan became necessary, the convention chose to recess rather than adjourn.\textsuperscript{16} The party had chosen to nominate Wallace and Reagan without the consent of either man.

\textsuperscript{13}Virginia Conservative Party Newsletter, January 1968, 2, Carter Papers.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., September 1967, 3, ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}Richmond Times-Dispatch, 17 September 1967, B-1.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
Prior to the convention, Bill Jones, Wallace’s national campaign manager, wrote a letter to Reid Putney in which he stated Wallace’s intentions for the 1968 presidential election. Jones wrote that Wallace had authorized T. Coleman Andrews, Jr., to organize a committee “to represent the Campaign in Virginia” and “where individual dedicated groups and political parties, such as yours, are interested in the Wallace Campaign, we find the results less entangled and more effective when we work through one group, and request all other groups in each state to cooperate with us through that group and its Chairman.”

Nevertheless, the Conservative Party nominated Wallace, and in October, filed “qualifying papers” with the State Board of Elections to put its electors for Wallace and Reagan on the 1968 presidential ballot in Virginia. Both Wallace and Reagan immediately disavowed the filing of qualifying papers on their behalf.

Reagan indicated that he would “act to have his name kept off the Virginia ballot.” His communications director, Lyn Nofziger, wrote Secretary of State Martha Bell Conway, that the “proposed slate does not have Governor Reagan’s sanction nor approval” and asked “what steps are needed to assure that Governor Reagan’s name does not appear on a presidential ballot in Virginia.” Wallace welcomed the support, but did not want his unannounced candidacy to be associated with any existing third party “that

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might bog down” his campaign “in local conflicts and campaigns.”21 He wrote Putney to ask that he, “as Chairman of the Virginia Conservative Party, take the necessary steps to officially withdraw the certificates which have been placed before the Virginia Election Board” and cooperate with the Andrews’ committee “to gain ballot position for me.”22

Another concern for Wallace was Virginia’s presidential ballot law. Enacted in 1948, the law allowed any new party, under the signatures of at least one thousand qualified voters, to place a ticket on the presidential ballot in Virginia.23 Since the Virginia Wallace Committee also intended to qualify electors for Wallace, there was a possibility that Wallace’s name would appear twice on the ballot, thereby, splitting his vote and preventing him from carrying the state with a plurality.24 Therefore, through the Virginia Wallace Committee, the Wallace campaign worked to have the Virginia Conservative Party remove its electors.

T. Coleman Andrews, Jr., chairman of the Virginia Wallace Committee, publicly attacked the Conservative Party for taking actions he considered “stumbling blocks in the way of complete unity” for the Wallace campaign.25 He expressed regret that the Conservatives had refused to heed Wallace’s wishes, and declared that their actions

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21Richmond Times-Dispatch, 14 October 1967, B-3.


23Richmond Times-Dispatch, 30 June 1968, B-1. The law was “a mild and liberal alternative to the anti-Truman bill” Governor Tuck had proposed in an effort to keep President Truman’s name off of Virginia’s presidential ballot in 1948. (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 14 October 1967, B-3)

24Ibid.

25T. Coleman Andrews, Jr., to All Members Virginia Committee and Other Leaders Wallace Campaign, 15 February 1968, Carter Papers.
would prove more harmful than helpful. He contended that Wallace had made his wishes clear, and declared that if F. Lee Hawthorne, under whose signature the Conservative Party filed the qualifying papers, was unaware of the letter Bill Jones had sent Putney prior to the convention, he was “unworthy of leadership in the Conservative party.” Moreover, Andrews opined that Wallace sought to distance his campaign from the Virginia Conservative Party because its electoral support in the 1966 elections for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives had diminished substantially from its vote total in 1965.

While Andrews concentrated on denouncing the actions of the Virginia Conservative Party and its leaders, the executive director of the Virginia Wallace Committee, Alexander Hudgins, formerly the Conservative Party’s executive director, approached the matter more diplomatically. In February, Hudgins wrote John Carter in an attempt to work out the differences between the Virginia Wallace Committee and the Virginia Conservative Party. He included information about the Wallace Committee’s intentions to organize a Virginia branch of the American Independent Party and reminded Carter of the benefits to Wallace if all support for him was funneled “into one operation.” He wrote that “we owe it to each other to sit down and see if there isn’t a ‘common ground’ on which all of this work can be put, so that the result will be in Virginia a victory for Wallace next November.” Andrews’ denunciations and Hudgins’

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26 Richmond Times-Dispatch, 17 October 1967, B-1.

27 Ibid.


diplomacy, rather than encouraging the Virginia Conservative Party to withdraw its electors for Wallace, actually strengthened its resolve to have Wallace run on the Conservative Party ticket.

The Conservatives excoriated Andrews for attacking the Conservative Party. They believed that excluding the party in the organization of Wallace’s campaign would be more detrimental than beneficial to the Wallace effort in Virginia. Hawthorne claimed that the Conservative Party had acted with “Wallace’s blessing” and charged the Andrews-Hudgins group with being “mainly interested in controlling the conservative vote within the Democratic Party in behalf of Democrats rather than Conservatives.”

Carter stated that “every elective official in Virginia, including” Andrews, ostracized Wallace during his visit to Richmond in 1964 and compared “Andrews’ failure to denounce the Democratic Party or to announce his withdrawal therefrom” to a “Trojan horse.” He believed that Andrews’ attacks on the Conservative Party would “make an accord between” the two groups “vastly more difficult” and that, if the group sincerely desired a “cooperative arrangement,” it should “hold off on these attacks.” He also wondered how the Wallace campaign could succeed without the Conservative Party’s participation, and suggested that, “it would have been much wiser had the leadership of the Conservative Party been called in initially and its aid sought in the Wallace Campaign on a cooperative basis rather than it having been treated as a red-headed step-child.”

Aside from criticizing the Andrews-Hudgins group, the Virginia Conservative Party

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31 Ibid., 17 October 1967, B-1.

continued actively organizing its own campaign for Wallace. In March, Reverend Beverly B. McDowell, the Conservative Party’s executive secretary, announced the opening of the “Wallace for President State Headquarters” in Richmond. The Conservative Party headquarters was the second such office opened, the first being the Virginia Wallace Committee’s headquarters that opened the previous year at the Hotel Jefferson.33 The most important development in the Wallace campaign in Virginia, however, was not the battle between the Andrews-Hudgins group and the Virginia Conservative Party, but the effect this battle was having within the Conservative Party.

As a protest against the leadership’s insistence that Wallace run on the Conservative Party ticket, Reid Putney resigned as party chairman on 27 April 1968. He was disappointed that, despite repeated requests that the party remove its electors for Wallace, “a controlling group” within the party’s State Central Committee seemed “dedicated to a course” that would damage Wallace’s presidential candidacy and “mean political death” for the Conservative Party. He argued that at a recent meeting on 18 April between himself, other party leaders and Wallace in Montgomery, Alabama, Wallace welcomed the Conservative Party’s support, but asked the party to remove its electors. According to Putney, when he asked at the State Central Committee’s 21 April meeting that the party “work out something satisfactory to Wallace,” the committee denied his request. Therefore, Putney saw “no alternative but to offer” his resignation.34 Immediately following Putney’s resignation, three other members of the State Central Committee, Wayne M. Myers of Monroe, George H. Melton of Bedford, and Phil Clore

33Richmond Times-Dispatch, 30 March 1968, B-1.
Jr. of Roanoke, resigned. Wayne Myers and George E. Pettit, Jr. of Pearisburg, the
elector candidates for the Sixth and Ninth Districts, respectively, also requested that the
State Board of Elections remove their names as electors for Wallace because neither had
given permission to be a candidate. The resignations of these key leaders and the two
requests to the State Board of Elections put the Virginia Conservative Party on the
defensive.

In a statement released to the press, the State Central Committee announced that
Putney “permitted his own personal desires to overshadow his loyalty to the party” and,
given the fact that the committee had recently organized a study group to devise a plan
“satisfactory” to Wallace, found his resignation “particularly regrettable.” Hawthorne,
recently elected the party’s new chairman, blamed “the Democratic-controlled Andrews-
Hudgins group” for the controversy. He considered the recent “unfortunate events” a
plan of “Professional Politicians to divide and destroy the Virginia Conservative Party”
and declared that “It should be evident to all that the Spoilers and Wreckers of the
Wallace Movement in Virginia are none but the Andrews-Hudgins group.” Since Putney
resigned four days before the expiration of his term as chairman and, because he had not
organized a city or county Conservative committee in the Sixth District, thereby making
him ineligible for reelection to the State Central Committee, Hawthorne believed that
Putney’s actions represented an effort to give “aid and comfort to the Democrats.”

35Ibid.

36Ibid., 5 May 1968, C-1; ibid., 10 May 1968, B-8.

37Ibid.

38F. Lee Hawthorne to Fellow Conservatives, 4 May 1968, Carter Papers.
Carter condemned Putney's statements to the press as “vicious attacks” and a deep “betrayal of the Party.” He stressed to the party membership, that despite these attacks upon the Conservative Party, it “has the same dedicated cohesion that it has enjoyed throughout the several years of its existence.”

The party also found it necessary to refute Putney’s allegations and clarify its actions. Hawthorne, in a letter addressed to the membership of the Conservative Party, contended that Wallace had never, at any time, either before the nominating convention or since, personally requested that the party not nominate him or remove its electors. He wrote that he, Carter, and Silverman met with Wallace before the party decided to nominate him for president and “came away satisfied that he . . . wanted us to help organize his campaign in Virginia.” The State Central Committee, therefore, planned a convention for the purpose of nominating Wallace. Before the convention, however, Hawthorne claimed that the Andrews-Hudgins group had “prevailed upon” Bill Jones to write Putney and request that the Virginia Conservative Party not nominate Wallace. Putney subsequently asked Ed Stuart to contact Montgomery and explain the party’s intentions “with the understanding that if nothing to the contrary was heard from them, or Gov. Wallace personally, it would be O.K. to proceed with the nomination.” Stuart did as directed, and according to Hawthorne, “No word was received from Governor Wallace or his headquarters requesting or directing any other courses.” Moreover, McKendree had contacted Bill Jones three days before the nominating convention in September 1967 and stated that Jones “did not request that the nomination not be made.” As further proof that

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39 John W. Carter to Fellow Conservatives, 4 May 1968, Carter Papers.

40 Stuart was a co-founder of the party and First District chairman.
Wallace never personally requested the party remove its electors, Hawthorne discussed the May 1968 meeting in Montgomery between Wallace and Conservative leaders, Carter, McKendree, Putney, and Hatcher Story. He declared that McKendree returned from the meeting "emphatically" stating that, "Wallace never asked the Virginia Conservative Party to remove its electors." When the State Central Committee discussed the results of the meeting, Hawthorne argued that, contrary to Putney’s allegations that his request to remove the electors was denied, it organized a study group, under the chairmanship of John Carter, "to work on this matter." Before the study group could meet, however, Putney resigned.\(^4\)

Since Hawthorne’s letter presented a different version of the events leading to his resignation, Putney circulated his own letter to defend his actions. He wrote that he never attacked the Conservative Party, but rather the leaders he considered responsible for betraying the party’s membership and George Wallace.\(^4\) According to Putney, these leaders refused to remove the Conservative Party’s electors in order “to either control Governor Wallace or else destroy him.” Moreover, he called the study group “a delaying tactic,” rather than a true effort to resolve the Wallace problem, and argued that if he had remained chairman until his term expired, the party’s membership would have never known the true facts of the events leading to his resignation. Putney listed the following facts as “undeniable”:

1 - In September, 1967, prior to the convention, the leadership was informed of the letter from Mr. Wallace’s aide, Bill Jones, requesting that the electors not be named.

\(^4\)F. Lee Hawthorne to Fellow Conservatives, 4 May 1968, Carter Papers.

\(^4\)The leaders Putney listed were F. Lee Hawthorne, John Crouch, George Burruss, Thaddeus T. Mudd, Ed Stuart, Ed Silverman, Sam Derr and William I. McKendree.
2 - In September, 1967, the VCP convention not only named Mr. Wallace's electors but named Mr. Reagan as his running mate without even the courtesy of asking either of them.

3 - In October, 1967, Mr. Hawthorne did file the petition with the State Board of Elections without some of the electors' permission.

4 - In October, 1967, I received a letter from Mr. Wallace requesting these names be withdrawn, and why he wanted them withdrawn. This request was not only denied but the "loyal cohesion" denied Mr. Wallace's right to conduct his own campaign.

5 - In April, 1968, a motion was put before the State Central Committee not to even meet with Mr. Wallace.

6 - In April, 1968, we met with Mr. Wallace and the request was again made to remove the electors.

7 - In April, 1968, I again requested that the electors be removed and they have not been.43

Previous press reports in which Wallace publicly called for removal of the Conservative Party's electors make Putney's version of events seem more credible. In addition to explaining why he resigned, Putney initiated a campaign to avoid a split of Wallace's support in Virginia. He wanted the party's members to express their opinions on whether the Conservative Party should remove the electors for Wallace and distributed postcards that asked them to check one of the two following statements:

If George Wallace so desires, I want the VCP slate of electors for George Wallace-Ronald Reagan to be removed from the ballot so that the Conservative vote will not be split.

Regardless of George Wallace's desires, I want the VCP slate of electors for George Wallace-Ronald Reagan to remain on the ballot, even if it splits the Conservative vote.44

Despite the resignations and Putney's campaign to prevent the splitting of Wallace's vote, the Virginia Conservative Party continued on a course that would damage his election hopes.

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43Reid T. Putney to Membership of the Virginia Conservative Party, n.d., Carter Papers.

44Richmond Times-Dispatch, 19 May 1968, B-2.
In mid-June, when Wallace visited Richmond to speak at City Stadium and attend a $25 a plate fund raising dinner sponsored by the Virginia Committee for Wallace, the Conservative Party organized a second Wallace dinner for $6 a plate.45 When asked about the conflicting dinners, Hawthorne commented that the Virginia Wallace Committee’s dinner was “for the rich people,” while ours was “for the working people.” The party’s executive secretary, Reverend Beverly B. McDowell, stated that its dinner was more of “a rallying point for the Conservative Party members” attending the rally for Wallace, than a fund raising dinner, and that some party members, including John W. Carter, planned to attend the Virginia Wallace Committee’s dinner. He also said that the party would invite Wallace to its dinner, but “knowing his schedule, we weren’t going to be presumptuous and assume that he would attend.”46 Wallace “disowned” the Conservatives’ dinner and authorized the Virginia Wallace Committee to give a $6 credit toward the cost of the “official dinner” to people who had bought tickets for the Conservative Party dinner.47 During his after dinner speech, Wallace asked the Conservative Party “to take the necessary steps to remove my name from their ballot” and to support his candidacy through the American Independent Party. Despite the personal plea, the Conservative Party announced that its electors for Wallace would remain on Virginia’s presidential ballot. In the announcement, McDowell contended that “any group attempting to destroy the Virginia Conservative Party also intends to destroy Gov.

47Ibid., 16 June 1968, B-1.
Wallace.\textsuperscript{48}

The Virginia Conservative party's insistence that Wallace run on its ticket was a refusal to cooperate with the Andrews-Hudgins group, not with George Wallace. The Conservatives considered Wallace "the only dynamic personality on the horizon... capable of banding together patriotic Americans into another party," thereby achieving their "long-range" objective of organizing a third party to give the nation's citizens "a choice."\textsuperscript{49} They believed, however, that Democrats, not true conservatives, controlled the Andrews-Hudgins group, and that the group had organized the Virginia branch of the American Independent Party only for the purpose of running Wallace for president in 1968, not for becoming a permanent political party. According to Hawthorne, the Andrews-Hudgins group was "organized for the purpose of controlling the Conservative vote in Virginia... and returning to Democrat control the 60,000 to 80,000 votes which have been held against them... in the last two General Elections."\textsuperscript{50} He declared that the Conservative Party aimed "to get Mr. Wallace elected President" not "become part of an organization headed by Lyndon Johnson."\textsuperscript{51} McDowell declared that the party "cannot remove its electors for George C. Wallace from the ballot without doing serious harm to the... Party, and suggested "that backers of Wallace work with it for his election."\textsuperscript{52} The party worried that funneling its support for Wallace through this group would eliminate

\textsuperscript{48}Richmond News Leader, 18 June 1968, 1.

\textsuperscript{49}John W. Carter to Alexander Hudgins, 28 February 1968, Carter Papers.

\textsuperscript{50}F. Lee Hawthorne to Fellow Conservatives, 4 May 1968, Carter Papers.

\textsuperscript{51}Richmond Times-Dispatch, 15 October 1967, A-14.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., 18 June 1968, A-10.
any hope of organizing a permanent political party and destroy "the only legal party in Virginia... that is fighting against Federal Tyranny and for [Virginia's] proud heritage."53

Although reconciliation between the Andrews-Hudgins group, now the Virginia branch of the American Independent Party, and the Virginia Conservative Party seemed impossible, attempts were made to forge a compromise. Andrews wrote Hawthorne asking for the Conservative Party's cooperation in respecting Wallace's wishes and inviting the party's members "to join and participate as individuals in the Wallace Campaign through the American Independent Party."54 Even John Carter, generally one of the most stubborn Conservative leaders, made a plea for the party to work out its differences with Wallace's campaign managers. At a Conservative Party rally in Kenbridge, Carter called for the Conservative Party to "sit down with [the] Wallace people and come up with a solution... that would be mutually advantageous; to consolidate in some manner in Virginia so at the end of the campaign we can amalgamate Conservatives around the country into one party." He did not advocate the party "become subservient to the Andrews-Hudgins group," but rather, find "a common meeting ground."55

The plea proved futile as Carter's remarks generated much disagreement within the Conservative Party. Beverly McDowell declared that the Virginia American Independent Party was a group of Democrats, not a political party, while McKendree

53F. Lee Hawthorne to Fellow Conservatives, 4 May 1968, Carter Papers.
called the Virginia Conservative Party the only “true representative of George Wallace in Virginia.” Hawthorne stated that the party had tried to cooperate with the Andrews-Hudgins group, “but what they want is complete surrender.” He quoted an official of the American Independent Party as stating that, the “Conservative Party could do two things. One, give up the Virginia Conservative Party, and secondly join us.” Wallace, therefore, had no other alternative but to seek a legal solution to the problem.

In August, L. Stanley Hardaway, Secretary of the State Board of Elections, asked Robert Y. Button, Virginia’s attorney-general, for his advice on how the board should handle both Wallace’s and Reagan’s requests that the Conservative Party remove its electors for them from Virginia’s presidential ballot. Button opined that Virginia law did not require a candidate to be forced to appear on a ballot without the candidate’s permission, run on a party ticket he “specifically” disavowed, or be denied the right to have his name removed if he so desired. He ruled that the board should honor Wallace’s and Reagan’s requests and remove their names from the ballot. The ruling did nothing to dissuade the Virginia Conservative Party.

Hawthorne vowed that the party would keep the electors on the ballot whether they were pledged to the Wallace-Reagan ticket, or not. He stated that the party had retained an attorney and “if necessary will carry the matter to court.” The party filed a petition with the Virginia State Supreme Court of Appeals, asking the court “to direct the State Board of Elections to place the names of Wallace and Reagan at the head of the

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56 Ibid.


58 Ibid., 18 August 1968, B-10.
Conservative Party’s slate of electors on the Virginia ballot.” Despite the party’s argument that it could “run on whomever it chooses, just as voters can mark a man’s name on a write-in ballot without the man’s permission,” the court refused to overturn Button’s ruling. The Conservative Party, however, still refused to give up and announced that it intended “to carry its legal fight” to the United States Supreme Court.

At this time, Carter again asked the party to back Wallace and stop trying to force him to run on the Conservative Party ticket. He expressed disappointment that the party wanted to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that the action “could serve no purpose but to further shatter public confidence in the Conservative party” and provide “an opportunity to bring disaster to Wallace’s campaign in Virginia by dividing his votes between two sets of electors.” He called for conservatives to “stop fighting” between themselves and “unite behind” Wallace. Despite Carter’s plea, the party appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court, however, refused to overturn the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruling and the Conservative Party’s electors for Wallace and Reagan were removed from the presidential ballot in Virginia. Although the Conservative Party lost its appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, Hawthorne stated that the party’s members would still support Wallace.

In addition to supporting Wallace, the Conservative Party nominated a candidate

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59Ibid., 24 August 1968, B-1.

60Ibid., 4 September 1968, B-4; Richmond News Leader, 6 September 1968, 1.

61Richmond Times-Dispatch, 12 September 1968, C-4.


63Ibid., 8 October 1968, A-1.

64Ibid.
for the U.S. House of Representatives. Louis A. "Pete" Brooks, Jr., of Waynesboro had announced in May that he would run for the Seventh District congressional seat against Democratic incumbent, Jack O. Marsh of Strasburg, and Republican, A. R. "Pete" Giesen of Staunton. He called both of his opponents "liberals" and declared that Marsh's refusal to vote for the censure of New York Representative Adam Clayton Powell, was "not a good credential for a Conservative." Brooks was given "little chance" of winning, and the results on election day vindicated such predictions. Marsh captured 64,865 votes, and easily defeated Giesen, who received 51,546 votes, and Brooks, who managed to garner only 2,837 votes.

As for Wallace, a possible split in his vote had been avoided, but this did not change the election's outcome in Virginia. The Old Dominion returned to the Republican fold in the 1968 presidential election; Nixon carried the state with 590,319 votes or 43.4 per cent, trailed by the Democratic nominee, Hubert H. Humphrey, who garnered 442,387 votes or 32.5 percent. Wallace placed third, capturing 321,833 votes or 23.6 per cent. He won sixteen counties and one city, primarily located in the black belt. For a third party candidate, Wallace fared extremely well in both Virginia and the nation. He emerged from the 1968 presidential election a national political figure and in a better position to pursue his ambitions of becoming president. The Virginia Conservative Party, however, was not as fortunate and ended the year badly divided.

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65Ibid., 21 May 1968, B-1.


67Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, 265-268. Wallace won the counties of Accomac, Bedford, Brunswick, Buckingham, Charlotte, Dinwiddie, Franklin, Halifax, Henry, Isle of Wight, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Nottoway, Pittsylvania, Prince George, Southampton, and the city of Chesapeake.
The division within the party resulted from some of the leaders' stubborn refusal to remove the electors for Wallace as repeatedly requested. These leaders claimed that cooperating with the Andrews-Hudgins group and removing the electors would destroy the party. In their effort to preserve the party, however, they hastened its demise. As a result of the disagreement key leaders resigned. Four former Conservative leaders, Colonel J. Addison Hagan, J. Robert Orgain, Jr., Reid T. Putney and Dr. Richard Odell Smith became candidates for presidential elector on the American Independent Party ticket. In 1969, the complete demise of the Virginia Conservative Party would become apparent.

68 Blackstone Courier-Record, 24 October 1968, 1.
CHAPTER IX

THE 1969 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

The 1969 gubernatorial election represented a culmination of the changes occurring in Virginia politics over the past decade. For the first time since Reconstruction, Virginia’s Republican party succeeded in electing its nominee as governor. The state Democratic party divided into three factions for the primary. The conservative Democrat, Lieutenant Governor Fred G. Pollard, finished third in the July election behind the liberal candidate, Henry E. Howell, Jr., of Norfolk, and the moderate candidate, William C. Battle of Charlottesville. Although Battle garnered more votes than Howell, he did not gain enough of a majority to win the nomination; therefore, a run-off election was held to decide the Democratic nominee. In August, Battle narrowly defeated Howell in an election that destroyed the coalition Godwin had built in 1965 and divided the Democratic party for years. While the Conservative Party had contributed to the fragmentation of the state Democratic party, it did nothing to affect directly the outcome of the political contests of 1969. The Conservatives, however, still had hopes of organizing a permanent political party and nominated a ticket for the general election.

In March, during what was described as “one of the calmest political conventions of all time,” the Conservative Party, unanimously nominated the Reverend Beverly B. McDowell for governor. He had announced his candidacy in October 1968 and was chosen “without the slightest intimation of opposition.” During his acceptance speech, he lambasted the state Democratic party and the federal government. The Democratic party, according to McDowell, stood “for nothing but winning elections,” while the three
candidates running in the Democratic primary were “all liberals.” As for the federal
government, he proclaimed that “tyranny existed in every locality,” stating that the home
and school had already been legislated, and that the church was next. McDowell was the
only candidate placed in nomination during the convention, as the party chose to
complete the ticket at a later date. In June, the convention reconvened and nominated
Louis A. “Pete” Brooks, Jr., of Waynesboro and Flavius B. Walker, Jr., of Richmond,
respectively, for Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General.

Brooks owned a sporting goods store in Waynesboro and had previously run for
the Seventh District congressional seat as a Conservative candidate in 1968. His
nomination came as a surprise, but Silverman, in nominating him, stated that he “did not
come seeking us, we sought him.” Brooks recalled years later that he was approached to
run because the other possible nominees lived in the Richmond area and the party wanted
to avoid having the entire ticket from the same area. Walker was a lawyer from
Richmond who never expected to run for office, but was doing so because his
“grandfather crossed the Potomac four times with J.E.B. Stuart.” In accepting the
nomination, he declared that conservatives must “redeem Virginia” because “the terms
are the same as they were in 1865” and stated that “They call me a reactionary and so help
me God, I am.”

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2Ibid., 29 June 1969, B-1.

3Ibid., 29 June 1969, B-6.

4Louis A. Brooks, Jr., interview by author, 27 September 1997, Waynesboro,
Virginia.

5*Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 June 1969, B-6.
The Conservative candidates called for local control of the schools, the preservation of law and order, the continuation of fiscal sanity, the reduction of taxes, and the removal of federal involvement in state affairs. Campaigning on the pledge that “Your child is your own - not a product of H.E.W.,” the party expressed its disdain for forced integration. McDowell declared that “closing schools, busing children and assigning teachers to achieve arbitrary race-mixing quotas clearly violate the intent of Congress and must be resisted.” He proclaimed that the federal government was “ruining” the schools and attacked Virginia’s officials for “doing nothing whatsoever.”

In addition to resisting forced integration, the Conservatives also pledged to preserve law and order and reduce taxes. The Conservatives believed that criminals received more protection and rights than law-abiding citizens. Walker promised that once elected he “would turn the police loose on the lawbreakers” as “they’re ready and willing and able to go right now.” To reduce taxes, the Conservative Party called for the “elimination of the sales tax on food and medicines.” When the Republican candidate, Linwood Holton advocated a $9 tax rebate in lieu of removing the sales tax on food and medicine, McDowell attacked his proposal as “merely another attempt to evade the real issues and fool the voters.” He stated that “Holton’s gimmick is unrealistic, impractical, and would prove to be a cruel hoax upon all who need relief from the iniquitous tax upon

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6Blackstone Courier-Record, 30 October 1969, 3.
7Ibid.
8Ibid., 1.
9Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 August 1969, C-8.
10Blackstone Courier-Record, 30 October 1969, 3.
11Richmond Times-Dispatch, 29 June 1969, B-6.
the absolute necessities of life.”

The party also called for fiscal responsibility by retaining the “pay-as-you-go” fiscal policy. “Pay-as-you-go” had received a major blow with the support of Godwin’s proposed $81 million bond issue in 1968 to finance the improvement of state colleges and mental hospitals. In 1969, voters would vote on whether to revise the state constitution, including, among other changes, increasing the commonwealth’s borrowing power to finance capital improvements. The old constitution essentially did not permit any borrowing unless “to construct, or reconstruct public roads, to meet casual deficits in the revenue, to redeem a previous liability of the state, to suppress insurrection, repel invasion, or defend the state in time of war.” Many Virginians believed that these restrictions on borrowing hindered the Commonwealth from moving forward into the mainstream of modern society. The Conservative Party, however, called for the defeat of the proposed revisions, declaring the new constitution a “farce” and “illegal.” The Conservatives also attacked their opponents for the same reasons as had their predecessors, but with much less vehemence. According to McDowell, Holton and Battle were “deftly sidestepping real issues, while grinding out a succession of phony proposals and fractional variations, for the apparent purpose of leading the voters to believe that

\[12\text{Ibid., 28 September 1969, B-5.}\]

\[13\text{Ibid., 17 March 1968, B-1. Despite these restrictions, the $81 million bond issue was legal due to the “safety valve” Governor Harry F. Byrd, Sr., inserted in the 1927-1928 constitutional revisions. The “safety-valve” allowed the issuance of bonds “under three conditions: (1) For specific, single capital outlay purposes; (2) Subject to approval by popular referendum; (3) The total is limited to the equivalent of 1 per cent of the taxable real estate values.” (Richmond Times-Dispatch, 17 March 1968, B-1)}\]

\[14\text{Ibid., 29 June 1969, B-6.}\]
there is a slight difference between them and the interests they represent."

The Conservative Party was not the only party participating in the 1969 gubernatorial election that embraced ultra-conservative tenets. While the conservatives cooperated, albeit reluctantly in 1968, and avoided a split in Wallace’s vote, the situation was different in 1969. In July, the state American Independent Party (AIP) convened at the Mosque in Richmond and nominated T. Coleman Andrews, Jr., of Richmond and Samuel J. Breeding, Jr., of Grundy, respectively, for governor and lieutenant governor. The convention, however, was anything but united.\(^1\) Previously, the AIP had held a convention in November 1968 to organize the party for the purpose of nominating candidates on the state and local level, but refrained from making any nominations. In the meantime, a committee, headed by Dr. William A. Pennington, Jr., of Buckingham, assessed prospective candidates for the 1969 gubernatorial election. T. Coleman Andrews, Jr., however, emerged from the November convention as the “most likely prospective candidate for governor.”\(^2\)

Addressing the convention in July, Andrews placed certain conditions on his candidacy, including the raising of “a minimum of $250,000” in campaign funds and the formation of a “firm campaign organization.”\(^3\) He also stated that his candidacy was contingent upon settling a personal business matter.\(^4\) When Pennington delivered the

\(^1\)Ibid.


\(^3\)Richmond Times-Dispatch, 24 November 1968, A-1.


nominating committee’s report that recommended the convention nominate Andrews and
Breeding, despite the conditions, and also let them choose their running mate for attorney
general, disunity broke out among the delegates.20 “A small, but vocal group called” for
the convention to endorse the Conservative Party ticket. Joseph Campbell of the Henrico
delegation, declared that, “We’re all conservatives and we won’t have a chance for
electing anyone unless the conservatives get together.”21

The leadership of the state AIP, however, did not intend to assist a party that had
stubbornly refused to cooperate in 1968. George Melton, the convention’s chairman,
“took strong exception” to the recommendation that the convention endorse McDowell.
He declared that the Conservative Party wanted “to destroy the AIP” and that McDowell
had played “a role in forcing Wallace to go into court in 1968 to get his name on the
Virginia ballot as the AIP candidate.” “Instead of all this jumping up and down and
yelling,” Melton exclaimed, “why don’t you go over to the Conservative party and get
them to join us?”22 A motion to put Andrews and Breeding’s nominations to a vote
ignited almost two hours of “wrangling over parliamentary procedure,” before the
convention voted 6081 to 1504 to put their names “in nomination.” Despite passage of
the motion, the dissenters attempted to place the names of McDowell and also George R.
Walker23 of Portsmouth “on the floor,” but, nevertheless, the “Andrews-Breeding forces .

20Ibid.


23Walker was a former city councilman in Portsmouth, who had announced in
January 1969 that he would seek the AIP nomination for governor. He would run in
November as an independent. The conservative forces, therefore, actually split three
ways in 1969. (Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, 4 January 1969, A-2.)
. . held firm." In August, however, Andrews withdrew from the race, citing his inability "to take a leave of absence" from his businesses. The party’s state central committee took it upon themselves to replace Andrews with Dr. William A. Pennington, Jr.

The decision to select Pennington without input from the entire party bothered some members. The Henrico County delegation voted not to support Pennington, prompting Andrews to ask T. A. Cole, the chairman of the Henrico County committee, to resign. In September, a group of the party’s members formed the “Independent Voters of the AIP” and endorsed the Conservative Party ticket. The actions resulted from objections to “Andrews’ control of the state party against the wishes of the majority of members of the party at the local level.” The conservative third party movement had been effectively split for the 1969 gubernatorial election. Together, the Virginia Conservative Party and the state American Independent Party might have influenced who was elected governor, but divided, neither would garner enough support to affect the election. While the splitting of the conservative vote would have placed a question mark on the outcome of Virginia’s political contests in previous years, it meant nothing in this election. The real battle involved two moderates, William C. Battle and Linwood Holton.

Both Battle and Holton campaigned on the theme of change and shied away from advocating any hard-line liberal or conservative positions. As the campaign wore on, Holton emerged as the odds-on favorite. His election hopes were buoyed with endorsements from the AFL-CIO and African-American voter groups, and support from

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both liberal and conservative Democrats. The support of these groups, however, resulted more from a lack of enthusiasm for Battle, than from enthusiasm for Holton. The liberal groups endorsed Holton to kill the Byrd Organization once and for all, while the conservatives hoped to perpetuate the Byrd Organization’s conservatism and “promote a realignment of political parties along conservative versus liberal lines.”

Liberal Democrats, the AFL-CIO and African-American voter groups supported Holton because of Godwin’s active endorsement of Battle during the run-off election. Godwin had shed his neutrality and campaigned energetically for Battle, but more on an anti-Howell than a pro-Battle basis. He also predicted a Holton victory in November should Howell, a liberal, be nominated and stated that he would not support Howell if he became the Democratic nominee. When Battle won the nomination, Howell stated that while he would support his party’s nominee, his supporters were “free spirits.” The state AFL-CIO resisted efforts from outside influences to endorse Battle, stating that “We’ve been waiting a lifetime to kill the Byrd machine and this our chance and we’re going to do it.” The African-American voter groups believed that Godwin had not fulfilled his promises to them after being elected with their help in 1965, and refused to support another “moderate-sounding Byrd Democrat” in 1969.

Another blow to Battle’s election hopes came with the defection of conservative Democrats. Conservative Democrats supported Holton because they considered Battle


28 Ibid., 190.

29 Bass and Devries, Transformation of Southern Politics, 353.

too closely aligned with the liberal national Democrats to warrant their support. In 1960, Battle had managed John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign in Virginia and, in 1966, he managed William B. Spong’s successful primary campaign against Senator A. Willis Robertson. Conservative Democrats not only provided Holton important votes, but more importantly financial support. The defections of both liberal and conservative Democrats ruined any chance of Battle building the coalition Godwin had enjoyed in 1965 and destroyed his election hopes.

In November, Virginia’s voters elected Linwood Holton the first Republican governor since Reconstruction, giving him 480,869 votes or 52.5 per cent to Battle’s total of 415,695 votes or 45.4 per cent. In addition to winning the traditional Republican stronghold of western Virginia, Holton garnered majorities in the urban and suburban areas and captured a substantial number of votes in the Southside. His victory, however, resulted from his “urban success” and his support from traditionally liberal Democratic voters.\(^{31}\) Although Holton benefitted from the support of these liberal groups, his running mates for lieutenant governor and attorney general, respectively, H. Dunlop “Buz” Dawbarn and Richard D. Obenshain, did not. The voters supported a split ticket, electing the Democratic nominees for lieutenant governor and attorney general, respectively, J. Sargeant Reynolds and Andrew Pickens Miller. Both Reynolds and Miller captured the liberal voters who had defected from Battle.\(^{32}\)

While the election provided both the Republican and Democratic parties with victories, it was an utter failure for the conservative third parties. Pennington, the

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\(^{31}\)Ralph Eisenberg, “The Emergence of Two Party Politics,” 79-80.

\(^{32}\)Ibid.
candidate for governor on the AIP ticket, captured only 7,382 votes. Samuel J. Breeding, the candidate for Lieutenant Governor, garnered the most votes of any third party candidate, but still lost badly, receiving only 16,839 votes. The Conservative Party fared worse in this election than in any other state-wide election in which it participated. McDowell captured a dismal 10,596 votes or 1.2 per cent, failing to win any county or city. His running mates fared a little better, but still very poorly. Walker, the candidate for Attorney General, garnered the most votes of any Conservative candidate, receiving 15,692 votes, while Brooks, the candidate for Lieutenant Governor, followed closely with 15,277. As with other statewide elections in which Conservative candidates participated, they received most of their support from the Southside. After the election, McDowell stated that “the small vote we got makes no sense to me.” “Anyway you cut the cake,” he added, “I just couldn’t see us getting less than 40,000 votes.”

McDowell placed part of the blame for the Conservative Party’s dismal showing on the placement of the candidates’ names on the ballot. In early November, he accused the two major parties and the State Board of Elections “with collusion in ballot tampering” for putting Brooks’ name in line with Pennington’s, and Breeding’s in line with McDowell’s “on voting machine ballots in Arlington, Norfolk, Virginia Beach and apparently many other counties and cities.” He called the ballot order “a deliberately conceived scheme to confuse voters that should be recognized as a major political scandal of the century in Virginia.” Apparently, the mix-up occurred because the letters sent from the State Board of Elections to the local electoral boards listed the candidates “Democrats

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first, Republicans second, and then independents in alphabetical order.” According to James E. Baylor, secretary of the electoral board in Norfolk, “the letter did not identify the other candidates by party.” Baylor apologized for the honest mistake, stating that “To tell you the truth, I never heard of the jokers.” While the ballot mix-up may have taken away votes from Brooks and added to Breeding’s total, it did not contribute to the Conservative Party’s low vote total.

The Virginia Conservative Party fared poorly in the 1969 gubernatorial election for two reasons. First, the state AIP candidates pulled away votes from the Conservative Party. Even with these votes, however, the Conservatives would have still polled far less than they had captured in either the 1965 gubernatorial election or 1966 senatorial elections. The primary reason for the party’s dismal performance in the 1969 gubernatorial election was its stubborn refusal to support Byrd, Robertson, and Abbitt in 1966 and remove its electors for Wallace in 1968. These actions had alienated so many conservative voters that the party’s vote total had decreased in every statewide election in which it had participated since 1965. The Conservatives had declared that their actions would preserve the party, thus helping their effort to establish a permanent conservative party to provide the conservatives of Virginia and the nation a choice. In the end, however, their actions destroyed the party, a development clearly evident in its poor showing in the 1969 gubernatorial election. The Virginia Conservative Party disappeared from Virginia’s political scene after 1969, never again running candidates for office.

CHAPTER X
CONCLUSION

The Virginia Conservative Party played a significant role in Virginia politics during the 1960's and was a symbol of the transformation occurring in one state due to national issues. Refusing to support conservative Democrats and capturing the support of the Southside’s white conservatives, the party contributed to the demise of the conservative Democratic Byrd Organization.

Under the leadership of Harry F. Byrd, Sr., the Byrd Organization had controlled Virginia politics since the 1920's. After World War II, however, the Organization faced its toughest challenge as urban and suburban areas grew, the federal government became increasingly powerful at the expense of the states, and African-Americans overcame decades of oppression to become an influential voter bloc. The Byrd Organization declined rapidly under the onslaught of this change, resulting in the state Democratic party’s drift toward the ideology of its national counterpart. The Virginia Conservative Party was both a reaction against and a contributor to the decline of the Byrd Organization’s dominance in Virginia politics. When some of Virginia’s conservative Democratic politicians, notably J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., and Mills E. Godwin, Jr., sought to adapt the Organization’s conservatism to meet the demands of a changing society, many conservatives expressed their outrage.

The Virginia Conservative Party represented a continuation of the protests that emerged in the aftermath of Almond’s surrender of massive resistance in 1959 and a political reaction to the changes occurring throughout the nation in the decades following
World War II. The Bill of Rights Crusade was organized in 1959 as a protest against Almond’s actions. Dedicated to defending a strict construction of the Constitution, the Crusade received much of its support from the ultra-conservative Southside. Although Almond’s actions did not bring about widespread desegregation, the Southside had clearly shown since 1954 that any disruption of the racial status quo was unacceptable. In 1961, the Bill of Rights Crusade evolved into the Virginia Conservative Council. Conservatives, increasingly frustrated with expedient politicians, organized the Council to promote the continuation of conservative principles, protect state rights, and fight the encroachment of socialism that they believed had permeated the federal government. Also, the Council was dedicated to offering voters what they deemed a genuinely conservative alternative to the major party candidates.

In 1964, southern disaffection with the national Democratic party that began in 1948 with the Dixiecrat revolt had reached its apex with President Johnson’s and the national Democratic Party’s support of civil rights. In 1964, the conservative Republicans captured control of their party and nominated Barry Goldwater for president. These conservatives considered statism the “first principle of totalitarianism” and believed that “only limited government fostered freedom.” Arguing that “unlimited federal power” had eroded the protections afforded by the Constitution, they believed that the federal government had no right either to effect “cultural and social change” or usurp the rights of the individual states. They also maintained that communism represented a serious threat to American ideals and that “American ideology, not economic aid, should be our primary export.”

Many Virginia conservatives, like their counterparts in other...
states of the old Confederacy, turned to the Republican Party in 1964 in opposition to the
direction of the national Democratic Party.

In Virginia, however, the Republican Party was still controlled by mountain-
valley moderates, whose philosophy was closer to Eisenhower's Modern Republicanism
than Goldwater's conservatism. Also, two Byrd Organization leaders, Albertis S.
Harrison and Mills E. Godwin, Jr., endorsed Lyndon Baines Johnson for president in
1964, an action that tainted the Byrd Organization with liberalism and political
expediency in the eyes of some of Virginia's conservatives. By 1965, these conservatives
considered neither the state Democratic and Republican parties, nor the Byrd
Organization representative of the conservative principles to which they adhered.

The Virginia Conservative Council had endorsed Goldwater in 1964 and attacked
Harrison and Godwin for supporting Johnson and riding on the Lady Bird Special.
Godwin, the Byrd Organization candidate for governor in 1965, received the brunt of the
Council's attacks. In July 1965, the Virginia Conservative Council deemed neither of the
two major parties' candidates conservative enough to warrant its support and organized a
third party to give the voters a conservative choice. The Conservatives nominated their
own candidate, William J. Story. Godwin was elected, but his victory was attributed to
his support among liberal and moderate Democrats, black voter groups, and labor unions.
The Conservative Party candidate, however, carried the Southside, once the bastion of
Byrd Organization support. Having exceeded expectations in 1965, some of the party's
members saw a real opportunity to form a permanent conservative party.

In early 1966, leaders of the Virginia Conservative Party dedicated to organizing a

1997), 18-19.
permanent party refused to support proven conservatives in the Democratic primary. These Conservatives could not in good conscience support any candidate of the Democratic Party, which in their eyes had adopted a socialist philosophy of government. Moreover, they had hoped that these conservative Democrats, notably Harry F. Byrd, Jr., A. Willis Robertson, and Watkins M. Abbitt would renounce the Democratic party and run as independents or Conservatives, thereby providing the proven leadership the Conservative Party needed to become a viable political organization. When they refused, the Conservative Party advised its members to refrain from entering the Democratic primary, and nominated candidates for the general election. By its stand, the party contributed to the defeat of Robertson and Howard W. Smith, and an unusually slim margin for Harry F. Byrd, Jr. The most significant result of the 1965 gubernatorial election and the 1966 Democratic primaries, however, was not Godwin’s plurality or the defeat of Robertson and Smith, but the fracturing of the conservative vote.

The emergence of the Conservative Party splintered the conservative vote in Virginia. Conservatives were no longer united for statewide elections, but divided among the Democratic, Republican, and Conservative parties. By 1969, Byrd Democrats found their influence in statewide elections greatly diminished. The Byrd Organization was no longer the dominant element in the state Democratic party as the party split into liberal, moderate, and conservative factions, with the conservative faction being the weakest of the three. Many conservative Democrats endorsed Republican Linwood Holton over William C. Battle, a moderate Democrat, in 1969, an action that contributed to Holton’s victory and set the stage for a dramatic political realignment. Although the state Republican party became increasingly attractive to conservative Democrats, it had not yet
become the agent of conservatism it became in the 1970's. The Conservative Party represented a stepping stone for many conservative Democrats not yet ready to become full-fledged Republicans. The party, however, destroyed any chance of unifying conservatives into one political party after alienating supporters with its refusal to support conservative Democrats in 1966 and to remove its electors for George Wallace in 1968.

In 1966 the Conservative Party experienced serious defections from its ranks for refusing to support Byrd, Jr., Robertson, and Abbitt. The nominating convention did not unanimously vote to run candidates in the general election and the party lost both editorial and electoral support. In 1968 the party's stubborn refusal to remove its electors for Wallace alienated many supporters resulting in the resignation of key leaders, the Virginia American Independent Party's nomination of its own gubernatorial ticket in 1969, and a dismal showing by the Conservative Party candidates in the 1969 gubernatorial election. The Virginia Conservative Party not only contributed to the splintering of the conservative vote in Virginia, but managed to split the ultra-conservative vote, thereby contributing to its own demise.

Composed primarily of former Byrd Democrats, the Conservatives were a group of Virginians who hated communism, abhorred the welfare state, detested any centralization of power in the federal government, and despised the civil rights movement. They were not politicians interested in acting expediently for the sake of achieving or staying in office. They neither masked their views nor pretended to be all things to all people. Like the Dixiecrats of 1948 and the massive resisters of the 1950's, the Conservative Party of Virginia desired a maintenance of the racial status quo and couched its rhetoric around the issues of state rights and anti-communism. The
Conservative Party represented one type of southern reaction to the changes occurring nationally, unique in that it spawned a political party. For many conservatives frustrated with forced integration, the influence of the civil rights movement, and the growing power of the federal government, the Virginia Conservative Party represented a refreshing alternative to what they deemed to be the politically expedient rhetoric and actions employed by professional politicians of both the Democratic and Republican parties. These conservatives sincerely believed that the nation was headed toward destruction and that the only chance for survival was to embrace the tenets upon which they believed the nation was founded. By splintering the conservative vote, however, the Virginia Conservative Party, ironically, did more to harm the cause of conservatism in Virginia during the 1960's than moderates or liberals.
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