

STILL BLAMING NADER?

CHECK THE FACTS:

During the last weeks of the presidential campaign, many Gore supporters waged a fear campaign in an attempt to scare progressives away from voting for Nader, with the claim that a vote for Nader would somehow help elect Bush. Now many of these same Democrats are blaming Nader voters for the outcome of the election. This is unsupported by the facts. As activists it is essential that we understand what really happened in order to effectively address the underlying problems in our electoral system. Below are some statistics to help clarify the various factors in Gore's loss.

DEMOCRACY DENIED

Gore won the popular vote by more than half a million votes nationwide, but lost the electoral college vote by a mere 3 votes. This is the most obvious reason for the questionable outcome of the election. It's now clear to everyone that the electoral college is an undemocratic and obsolete anachronism, which does not accurately reflect the will of the voters; it is high time we abolished it.

FLORIDA FIASCO

The second reason is the fiasco in Florida, where Bush "won" by 537 votes, according to the last official count. We don't know how many *correctly marked, legitimate* ballots went uncounted due to mechanical failures and errors by election officials, but it is estimated at well over 30,000, perhaps over 100,000. What is more alarming is that over 8,000 legal voters (many of them Black) were prevented from voting because they were incorrectly identified as felons. Hundreds of voters (nearly all Black and Hispanic) were prevented from voting by illegal police roadblocks; thousands more Hispanics were asked for two pieces of ID, then turned away. (No whites were asked for ID.) Thousands were prevented from voting by broken or inadequate voting booths, all in predominantly Black neighborhoods. Given that more than 90% of the Black vote in Florida went to Gore, it is safe to assume that most of these 'stolen' votes would also have gone to Gore, who then would have won Florida by a clear margin. It is also likely that, had the US Supreme Court not halted recounts, the final total would have favored Gore.

GORE'S APPEAL

Perhaps the biggest reason Gore lost is Gore himself. Al Gore is not just stiff or boring; he is utterly without moral convictions, and the voters intuited this and were repulsed by it. His positions and track record on many key issues, from social welfare to star wars, were almost identical to Bush's. Gore's only appeal to most voters was as the lesser of two evils – hardly the basis for a rousing get-out-the-vote campaign. Gore lost 12 states, which Clinton carried in 92 and 96, including his home state of Tennessee. Not only did Gore fail to appeal to independent and occasional voters, he was unable to hold on to the base of his own party: exit polls show that **12% of the Democrats, who voted in November, voted for Bush! Less than 2% of voting Democrats voted for Nader.** (Only about 4% of Republicans voted for Gore and about 1% for Nader.) If Gore had been able to sway just 1 in 35 of these 'Bush Democrats', he would have carried enough states to win. We should also remember that half the voters stayed home; had Gore turned out just 1 in 300 non-voting Democrats (0.35%), he would have won – without Florida.

THE REAL TARGET

Far more Democrats defected to Bush than to Nader, yet the Gore-backed campaign of fear was directed only at Nader supporters. Much of their fear-mongering was focused in states like California, Texas, and New York, where voting for Nader made no electoral difference because either Bush or Gore already had the state locked up. It makes no sense – *if* the goal was to keep Bush out of the White House. In fact, their real purpose was nothing of the sort. Sure, rank-and-file Democrats really believed that Dubya was

the anti-christ, and that his election would bring the downfall of civilization, as we know it. But Wall Street doesn't care whether it's Bush or Gore – both serve the same corporate interests. What the corporations *don't* want is a viable, progressive third party mounting a serious challenge to their control of the Democrats and Republicans. Had Nader received 5% of the popular vote nationwide, the Green Party would have become eligible for more than ten million dollars in federal campaign funds in 2004. That would have bought the kind of staff and infrastructure needed to build a viable third party capable of reaching millions of voters, winning elections, and breaking open the 'duopoly'. The fear campaign did nothing to keep Bush out of office, but it clearly succeeded in keeping the Greens from qualifying for federal funding. The result of the mis-directed hysteria over Nader is that the Republicans have consolidated power in DC, the Democrats are sliding further to the right in their attempt to be 'Republican-lite', and the voters have less reason than ever to vote for a major-party candidate.

NADER'S IMPACT:

So how much impact did Nader have? According to various exit polls (USA Today, The Oregonian, others), second choice among Nader voters was *not* always Gore, as some Democrats assume. Polls asked: if Nader were not in the race, whom would you have voted for? Answer: Gore: 43-47%, Bush: 21-23%, neither: 30-36%. This means that the presumptive marginal effect of Nader voters was less than 25% of total Nader vote (45% for Gore, less 22% for Bush). In other words, had Nader "dropped out", Gore's total would have only increased over Bush by less than one-quarter of Nader's votes.

So how many states did Gore lose by less than 25% of the Nader total? Exactly two: Florida and Iowa, and we know what happened in Florida. In Iowa, Gore lost by 4,414 votes, while Nader received 29,374. The general increase in voter turnout due to interest in Nader's presence in the race has been estimated at 5% or even higher. A significant portion of those voters ended up in Gore's column, so it's likely that removing Nader from the race would have actually resulted in Gore losing the state by an even wider margin. However, if you make no allowance for this increase at all, then one could argue that, in Iowa, an Instant Runoff Voting system (which we advocate) could have changed the outcome. (Clinton carried Iowa by 6% in 1992 and by 10% in 1996. Registration in Iowa is 32% Democrat, 33% Republican, and 35% Other.)

The only other state in which anyone could even pretend Nader was a factor was New Hampshire, where Gore lost by 11,711 votes, about 53% of Nader's total of 22,188 votes. If 23% of those Nader voters had voted for Bush instead, then almost every other single Nader voter - 73% of the remaining 77% - would have had to vote for Gore to elect him, an extremely unlikely scenario based on exit polls (and common sense - many Nader supporters simply would not vote for Gore under any circumstances.) In every other state Gore lost by far more votes than Nader received.

SO WHO'S TO BLAME?

Think it through. Do the math. This election was lost by a Democrat who was unpalatable to three out of four eligible voters, including many in his own party, even when the alternative was 'Shrub' Bush. This election was stolen by fraud, equipment failures, outdated balloting procedures, partisan courts, and most of all, by an archaic, undemocratic voting system. Very few democracies other than the US still use winner-take-all elections, and no other nation on earth uses an Electoral College. If we had chosen the president by popular vote, using Instant Runoff Voting, then Gore would have won by a clear majority, not just a narrow plurality. More importantly, Nader would have received 10-15% of the first-choice vote, sending a powerful message to right-leaning Democrats and showing the real strength of progressive voters. Because the outcome would have reflected the true will of a majority, it would have been accepted by all, and none of the legal shenanigans in Florida would have been necessary. And if we had a true multi-party democracy and public financing of elections, we might have had viable progressive candidates to vote for. Don't blame Nader for giving voters a meaningful choice. Blame the two-corporate-party duopoly for once again forcing the evil of two lessers on the American voters.