

A FRIENDLY LETTER TO THE GREENS

By Michael Ventura

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During the '96 election I wrote that there was little functional economic or foreign policy difference between Democrats and Republicans -- Repdems, I called them. I said (but can't recall if I wrote) that we'd be better off if George Bush Sr. had beaten Bill Clinton in '92, because Clinton's ineptitude had handed congressional dominance to Newt Gingrich's Republicans, whereas Bush Sr. would probably have lost congressional seats in midterm elections, keeping Congress out of the hands of archconservatives. In '96 I voted Green. With Clinton selling out every social cause he could manage, the difference between Bill and Bob seemed minuscule.

George W. Bush was a different matter. The people he gathered around him during the 2000 election -- Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and their ilk -- weren't merely conservative, they were far-right radicals. I took seriously Newt Gingrich's stunned response to Bush's choice for a running mate: "Cheney's way to the right of *me!*" said Gingrich in what sounded like a voice caught between surprise and alarm.

I was familiar with the foreign policy proposals Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz had been making for years. Their position papers were clear. These people openly intended a drastic shift in American priorities: an aggressive military empire, the complete subordination of the environment to short-term economic interest, a massive shift of wealth to the very rich, and a many-pronged attack on the working poor and middle class with the goal of making them ever more helpless and subservient. The GOP was now completely in the hands of the radical right. The two parties were no longer the same.

Surely Ralph Nader had access to the same data, yet he continued to insist nothing had changed -- that this was still the GOP of Bob Dole. Still it was understandable that people who saw the destructive effects of globalization would believe Nader -- not because they're any less intelligent than I, but because not many are in a position to devote hours a week to getting firsthand information. Nader's record was, until then, impeccable, so why *not* believe him?

In the weeks between the 2000 election and the Supreme Court's decision handing the presidency to George W. Bush, Ralph Nader revealed himself in a most disturbing fashion. In a *New York Times* interview published on Nov. 18, 2000, Nader said "he remained untroubled by the possibility that George W. Bush of Texas would become President because the Green Party took votes away from Vice President Gore. If Mr. Bush prevails, he said, his very narrow margin, the closely divided Congress, and Mr. Bush's personality will limit the danger he can do. 'He doesn't know very much,' Mr. Nader said of Mr. Bush. 'He is not very energetic. He doesn't like controversy.'"

It isn't a matter of whether Ralph Nader is right or wrong on the greater global issues. (For the record, I agree with him in that area; if anything, I'm to the left of him.) But a political leader who's *that* wrong about his opponents -- especially when their goals have been clearly stated -- is not a man to vote for or to follow, no matter what his other qualifications may be.

Bush became president. On his second day in office he issued an order forbidding American money to any organization around the world that counseled abortion. On Jan.

30, 2001, Robert Scheer wrote in *The Los Angeles Times*: "Fully one-third of the world's workforce is effectively unemployed, and the United Nations estimates that 500 million new jobs must be created just to accommodate new arrivals in the job market over the next decade. Developing economies do not stand a chance of meeting that demand without aggressive population control. Yet Bush has chosen to cut funding for the very organizations, most notably Planned Parenthood, that work hardest to make birth control information available throughout the world." On Feb. 2, 2001, Anthony Lewis wrote in *The New York Times*: "What it means on the ground is this: A woman who has AIDS comes to a clinic somewhere in Africa or Asia. Drugs to prevent transmission of the disease to newborn infants are not available there. She desperately wants to avoid bearing the child. But the doctor or nurse cannot advise her on a safe legal abortion if the clinic wants to keep its American funds." That is a *big* difference between the Democratic Party and the new Republican Party.

In the next weeks, Bush -- whom Nader claims "doesn't like controversy" -- began offering government funds to religious institutions and proposed the tax cuts that have since shifted untold wealth from working people to the rich, turned a surplus into an enormous deficit, bankrupted the states, and cut essential services like child care and police protection. Even someone who despises the Democrats as much as I do has to admit that no Democrat would have done *that*. But on Feb. 18, after Bush's radical agenda was clear, *The New York Times* asked Nader, "So you really believe that the two parties are the same?" "Yes," Nader replied, "on most issues."

"Any regrets?" the *Times* asked. "Yeah," Nader replied, "I didn't get more votes."

In the next month Bush rejected the Kyoto environmental accords, broke off arms-control talks with North Korea, sent strong signals that he would unilaterally end our arms treaty with Russia, and began his insidious policy of appointing anti-environmental lobbyists to environmentally sensitive government posts. None of this made an impression on Ralph Nader. In a second *New York Times* interview published April 23, the headline read that Nader "Sees a Positive Side of Bush Policy." Nader claimed that Bush was somehow "raising the environmental issues" because "environmental groups' treasuries are swelling." Correctly Nader said of Gore, "*He* didn't get Tennessee, *he* didn't get Arkansas." But Nader refused to admit that his 97,000 votes in Florida tipped the scales in a state where, when the tallies were done, there was only a 537 vote difference between Bush and Gore -- or that his votes in New Hampshire were thousands more than the Bush-Gore gap; he enabled Bush to carry that state too.

This was before 9/11, which supplied the Bush administration with the excuse to gut our Constitution, arrest Americans without warrant or hope of trial, and declare an "America strikes first" foreign military policy -- and before they lied to invade Iraq. But even now, Nader has no (admitted) regrets.

Of *course* Gore ran an inept campaign; but it was ept enough to get him elected if Nader hadn't run. And of course Gore was a corporate compromiser; but millions are suffering today, in our country and the world over, for policies that everyone knows Gore would not have condoned. And that is a *difference*, friends. A terrible, essential, undeniable difference.

With Nader's refusal to admit the consequences of his acts; with his brazen evasiveness when asked a direct question about the 2000 campaign; and with his inflexible, petulant rejection of anything that contradicts his doctrines -- the politician he most resembles is George W. Bush.

In their behavior (which is more crucial than their beliefs), George W. Bush and Ralph Nader are twins separated at birth.

I cannot imagine a worse fate for a man of Ralph Nader's convictions and record. His misreading of George W. Bush; his exaggeration, for political gain, of the similarities between *the present* Republican and Democratic parties; and his misuse of the trust of the Greens -- are a direct cause of the gutting of our Constitution, a rampage against nature, and the suffering of many millions of his fellow creatures. I don't wonder he can't admit it. What decent human being could live with that burden? Let him keep his illusions if they're the price of his sanity.

He can't admit it, but what happens if you don't? No Green Party candidate can win the presidency in 2004; but for the Democratic candidate to prevail a substantial number of Greens *must* vote Democratic. Bush has indulged in extreme actions of the gravest consequences *even though he knows he must face re-election*. What will he be capable of if he wins and has no re-election to check his desires? What terrible power is the Bush Junta saving to wield after 2004?

That is the question Greens must face. You raise many excellent questions about the United States and the world, but at this juncture *that* is the question on which our future hinges.

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