

## ***PERFIDY***

**By Michael Ventura**

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Shortly before the Supreme Court handed the presidency to George W. Bush, Ralph Nader attempted to placate Democrats and the left with a position contradictory at its core: His candidacy was an important stand for progressive values *but* it wasn't so important that it cost Gore the election. The electoral numbers demonstrated otherwise, but that didn't faze Nader. He told *The New York Times* (Nov. 18, 2000) not to worry about Bush becoming president because, Nader assured us all, Bush's "personality will limit the danger he can do. ... He doesn't know much. He is not very energetic. He doesn't like controversy."

Nader's assessment was self-serving and foolish. Bush doesn't know much? Alas, George W. Bush knows a great deal. He knows how to increase the power of the very rich while decimating the power of everyone else. He knows how to lead the U.S. into an illegal and incompetently managed war. He knows how to sell at least half the American people on the righteousness of his actions. And, most important, he knows how to tell the Big Lie. Bush's energy in such matters is unbounded. And he not only relishes controversy, he and his handlers are masters at manipulating controversy.

These Bush "strengths" manifested in the first weeks of his presidency: He quickly took drastic action against women's right to choose; he indicated that the U.S. might not sign promised environmental treaties and might not honor nuclear nonproliferation treaties; and he proposed a budget intended to make the very rich much richer while bankrupting a government surplus that might have benefited people of all classes. Nevertheless, on Feb. 18, 2001, after Bush's radical-right agenda had become clear, *The New York Times* asked Nader, "So you really believe that the two parties are the same?" Nader replied, "Yes, on most issues."

So, by his own confession, for Ralph Nader "most issues" don't include the rights of women, the environment, the economy, and nuclear proliferation.

However, the real issue in that interview was Nader's refusal to admit that his good intentions might have caused irreparable harm. The election of 2000 had pushed Ralph Nader into an existential sinkhole, giving him but two choices: turn to the refuge of self-delusion or face the consequences of his actions. The second choice would force him to endure the inevitable shame and dread of self-confrontation – after which he would either collapse psychologically or emerge from the ordeal a chastened, wiser, and perhaps more effective man. But Nader, like Bush, has no gift for looking in the mirror. He chose delusion.

In the month following that interview Bush definitively rejected the Kyoto environmental accords, broke off arms-control talks with North Korea, said flat-out that he would unilaterally end our nuclear treaty with Russia, and began his insidious policy of appointing anti-environmental lobbyists to environmentally sensitive government posts. This made no impression on a Ralph Nader now committed to defending a delusion. In a second *New York Times* interview published April 23, the headline read that Nader "Sees a Positive Side of Bush Policy." Incredibly, Nader claimed that Bush was somehow "raising the environmental issues" because "environmental groups' treasuries are swelling" – as though we should measure environmental progress not by

the harm done to the planet but by how much money was contributed to fight the devastation. In that interview, Nader again 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. Reality was becoming less and less significant to Nader; like a religious fanatic, Ralph Nader had a vision, and anything that impinged on that vision was either wrong or unimportant.

We all know Bush's record since April 2001. And we all know Nader's response. The facts – and their consequences for millions all around the world – matter to Nader as little as they matter to Bush. Nader is running in 2004 because *not* to run would be a tacit admission of the damage he's already caused – and that's no way to defend a delusion. Nader *had to* run again, or admit that he'd been wrong. And he can't do that. What he prefers is this: to endanger every cause and value he claims to believe in – and to accept GOP money and assistance, though he knows, he *knows*, that Republicans help him because his candidacy helps Bush. But in accepting assistance from the radical right, Nader loses the final thing that set him apart: the claim to being the one *pure* choice. Instead, he's descended into the same expediency he criticizes in Democrats. In the most literal way possible, he has become his enemy.

Like Bush, what Nader does contradicts everything he says. Nader is giving power to the very people whom he *says* are our worst threats – the radical right, the corporations, the devastators. And in matters of power, acts matter far more than words.

And who does Nader most resemble when he refuses to admit the consequences of his acts? Who does he resemble when he brazenly evades any direct question about his 2000 and 2004 campaigns? Who does he resemble when he inflexibly, petulantly rejects anything that contradicts his self-image? None other than George W. Bush. As I've written before: In their behavior (which is far more crucial than their beliefs), George W. Bush and Ralph Nader are twins separated at birth.

Our beliefs broadcast what we wish; our acts tell what we are.

No matter what delusions Nader insists upon, his acts brand him as an agent of the radical right.

In the polls published as I write, voters who favor Nader are the deciding factor in several swing states. In 2000, those voters were innocent of what Bush would do. They're not innocent anymore. Anyone voting for Nader votes for the radical right – no matter how good their intentions may be. For intentions don't matter. Only consequences matter. History does not accept excuses and is only academically interested in reasons. History judges consequences.

Millions have suffered, and millions more may suffer, because Ralph Nader, like George W. Bush, has become so enmeshed in delusion that he has only one core belief: Whatever he does is right, is correct, is for *your* own good, no matter what. Nader values only intentions; he refuses to face consequences. And so do those who follow him.

There is a word you don't hear much anymore because most Americans are too poorly educated to know it:

Perfidy.

Webster's defines it as: "Betrayal of trust. Treachery." From the Latin *per*, "through," as in "to pierce through," and *fides*, "faith," as in perforating of the faith, a piercing of the faithful. *The Oxford English Dictionary*: "Faithlessness. Treachery ...

deceitful violation of faith ... often the perforation of faith or friendship in order to deceive or betray."

Ralph Nader's candidacy is an act of perfidy. Nader knows that many of us, even most who will vote Democratic, are disgusted and appalled at the timid and compromised good intentions of the Democratic Party. He knows that many are sickened at heart by "the lesser of two evils" and "half a loaf is better than none." He knows that most people live by compromises they only barely endure, and they wish for the impossibility of one pure act – one act to lift them from the grayness they've acceded to in their daily lives, one pure moment that will give validity to their ideals. He says that a vote for Nader is that pure moment. His perfidy is that he seduces his followers into the fragile belief that *he* can make them pure – that he can supply a moment that transcends the morass. Vote for him and you're above it all.

But you're not. The day after you vote for Ralph Nader, or any other alternative candidate, George W. Bush will have more power and you will be more badly compromised than the day before.

History will call you Fool. But, given what Bush will do in the next four years, you may despise yourself long before History despises you.

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