

The 1988 Election

Nobody Won!

Fifth Estate Collective

1988

The 1988 Presidential electoral farce was all over by midnight on Tuesday, Nov. 8. Vice-President George Bush victoriously declared, "The people have spoken."

Bush was right in one regard: the people had spoken but in a manner reported virtually nowhere. Those eligible to vote avoided the polls in record numbers to the point where Nobody won an absolute majority among the potential electorate for the first time in 64 years.

50.1% of those qualified to vote, whether out of apathy, disgust or both, simply stayed home. Bush received a scant 27% of the possible vote with an overwhelming number of those coming from white males.

Much was made by commentators of all political persuasions of the candidates' facile and manipulative use of television commercials. They focused mainly on the racist nature of the Bush campaign's ad featuring the story of black convict Willie Horton who murdered a white woman while on a furlough program from his presidential rival's home state. As repulsively racist as the ads were (combined with what one pundit described as a slur de jour campaign) none of the ads were effective enough to herd people to the polls and stop what one political consultant called "a departicipatory democracy"—less people involved with each passing election. Of course, none of those involved in bemoaning the massive abstention considers that it constitutes a boycott based on the almost universal recognition that power in society lies elsewhere than in the sham electoral process.

The real function of the Horton ads was missed entirely. They did not act so much as the cause of why otherwise fairminded people responded to racist appeals and voted for Bush, but rather served as the public justification for defending their white privilege.

A vote for Bush was a clear vote for the Empire. In many cases, the vote for Michael Dukakis was based on a desperation over the Reagan administration policies in Central America and Palestine, but spoke eloquently to how deeply rooted is the electoral illusion in the liberal sector of society.

Dukakis no more than Bush had any intention of challenging what is simultaneously at the root of each political crisis, and ultimately at the core of the American Empire: the pyramidal-shaped maldistribution of wealth based on the industrial plunder of the planet.

This never discussed social equation means that the richest 10% of American families owns 83.2% of all personal wealth while the rest of us share the remaining scant 16.8%. More importantly, the richest half percent of the population, that sector which personifies the ruling class, owns close to 50% of all privately held wealth and it is this concentration which translates into political and social power. The life of opulence lived by the rich is a direct result of an economy of looting which comes at the expense of millions of poor, domestically and in the Third World.

Further, that top 1.5 million people owns more than two-and-a-half times as much wealth as the 212 million people in the bottom 90%, and to protect that dominance the rich will literally kill—in Vietnam (3,000,000), in the Persian Gulf, in Central America (300,000) or at home. Both candidates were committed to defending this ruling state of affairs, and featured campaigns steeped in obscene images of patriotism and fidelity to the Cold War.

Both candidates ran racist campaigns in an attempt to win votes from the so-called “Reagan Democrats”—a thinly disguised code word for white racist males. Dukakis’ effort was only slightly distinguished from Bush’s by its less ham-handed approach which meant distancing himself from Jesse Jackson and barely mentioning civil rights.

Perhaps the most telling remark of the entire campaign came early on in the primaries from Jesse Jackson, the darling of the leftists and liberals. Jackson had already capitulated to Zionist domination of U.S. foreign policy by agreeing not to meet with PLO Chair Yasir Arafat in recognition of the strangle-hold wealthy Jewish contributors have on the Democratic Party. (Interestingly, Reagan and Bush feel no such constraints and have begun negotiations with the PLO after Arafat’s conciliatory UN speech in December.)

Jackson, in an interview given to the *Detroit Free Press* editorial board and published on March 21, 1988 was asked, “Under what conditions would you commit United States troops abroad?” Jackson candidly replied, “If *our* (FE emphasis) interests were threatened, I would keep troops in Korea at the demilitarized zone... I would keep our troops in Europe as a deterrent force. I would keep them in the Philippines. I would deploy troops according to what our needs are.”

In other words, there was a unanimity among all of the candidates to defend the U.S. Empire of wealth abroad whenever it is threatened. No president has acted any differently and none ever will. The function of the U.S. government, or for that matter all political states is to protect the wealth and privilege of those at the top.

Voting is a hopeless undertaking which only sows illusions, and the realization that 50.1% refused this last election, that Nobody won a majority, is interesting but far from a cause for celebration. Only when those abstainers turn their rage on the political apparatus, when active subversion of the Empire commences, should the cheering begin.

FE Note: As we go to press the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate announced that although the voter turnout was the lowest in 64 years, it stayed just above the half mark at 50.1%, thus denying Nobody a clear majority. We take this post-election contradiction of the CBS figures as akin to the rigging of the Mexican elections and declare that Nobody has a mandate to rule us.

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