

Post-election post-mortem

Four more years ... of resistance!

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Editorial 1: Don LaCoss

It's finally over. Now we can get back to work. Over the last seven months a surprising number of our comrades were increasingly distracted by the seductive spectacle of humiliating Bush and Cheney on a grand scale. Anarchists I know, respect, and love voted, ferchrissakes, in their overwhelming desire to publicly rub Bush's nose in it. But in the back of their minds they all knew that a Kerry victory wouldn't change anything other than infinitesimally retard the atrocities, plunder, and human rights abuses carried out in the name of the USA.

So, other than the bitter tang of disappointment that some might now taste, nothing really changed. The only thing different that Wednesday morning if Kerry had won would have been that our mug of black coffee would have been slightly sweetened by the deep, delicious flavor of *schadenfreude*. But we would still be tirelessly organizing and plotting against the Empire. I'm not saying that it wouldn't've been great to see al-Jazeera network footage of resistance fighters in Fallujah celebrating a Bush defeat, but even if Kerry had won, the monstrous US offensive to reoccupy those thirty-five or forty insurrectionary cities in late November would have gone on as scheduled. At least now the war criminals and war profiteers who started this catastrophe will be on hand to personally reap their own whirlwinds.

So now that the Skull and Bones skullduggery of the presidential campaign is over, I urge all of us to get fired up, hunker down, and get on with the business of driving stakes through the hearts of these vampires. In addition to welcoming the voting anarchists back into the fold, it's also time to radicalize the already-unhappy left-progressives into more creatively radical positions. Let's welcome them all to our nightmare and make room for them here with us in the underground.

Don't waste one more minute bellyaching about disenfranchised votes or voting machine irregularities or the black-hole ignorance of the corporate mass media's lowest common denominator. Of course there was voter fraud—there's always been voter fraud and there always will be so long as folks continue to believe that ballots are synonymous with democratic self-rule. There's no need to mount some logical, reasoned arguments about Bush's lack of legitimacy. All governments are illegitimate and all States are rogue.

There are something like 200 million people who are (ostensibly) legally allowed to vote in the US; 59 million of those chose to openly support the Bush-Cheney regime. Statistically, then, there are still many more of us than there is of them, especially on a global scale. But although we are in solidarity with the overwhelming majority, please remember that most of those 59 million people that I mentioned probably fear you or hate what you believe in. They are so afraid that they would do anything to make you think just like them or be forcibly made to shut up and get into line. Some of them would even cheer to see you killed for your beliefs, so sharpen your knives and look both ways before crossing the street.

We were right to stand up with the world against the Bush-Cheney regime a year ago, we were right to continue to do so all the way up to Monday, November 1, and, now, we're still right, if not more so.

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Editorial 2: David Watson

On November 2, 2004, which appropriately also happened to be the Day of the Dead, I did what I had not done since 1972: I voted for a candidate in an election. I intended only to vote against the regime in what had clearly become a national plebiscite on its legitimacy, policies, and war, but as a young liberal I know caustically reminded me, I had to vote for one politico in order to vote against the other.

So I pulled the lever for Kerry, and am neither embarrassed nor regretful. I knew that voting reflected political impotence, but that day it was clear I had an instrument of only one note, and I decided to play the note I had. I decided to carry out this innocuous act as an experiment.

It was also a gesture of community with the vast majority of my friends, neighbors, and family (including, as far as I could tell, a large majority of anarchists and other radicals) who had few or no illusions about the Democrats, but who saw it as almost a sacred obligation to let the world know they were saying no to that Mussolini rodent, Bush, and in particular to his invasion and bloody occupation of Iraq.

(I mean no offense to rodents, really, or to that fascist bastard Mussolini, for that matter, who at least was an actual war veteran who paid some dues, which my dad, a World War II vet who despised Bush as much as I do, and who died before having the pleasure of voting against him, reminded me. I voted for my dad; he always tolerated my abstentionism, even sympathized with it at times, but if he had still been alive, he would have smacked me with his cane if I hadn't voted this time.)

I also voted for Kerry despite the objections of a handful of friends and acquaintances working for Nader; they apparently had some trotskyst notion that a few thousand votes for their candidate and a couple of converts to their party would mean more than participating in a significant social response to throw the bastards out come hell or high water.

Nader himself acknowledged there was some difference between a Republican and Democratic victory; he wasn't a candidate so much as an ego trip. I was more sympathetic to his running mate in 2000, Winona LaDuke, than to him, and this year, even she voted for Kerry.

I also admit to having had a small soft spot for Kerry because he had been an antiwar vet, and I thought it useful to send the message that the antiwar vets were right, or at least that Americans wouldn't reward the scum who vilified them. I think that was one of the things that started me following the campaign and considering going ahead and voting just to stick it to the Swift Boat assholes.

Of course, though I was an active supporter of antiwar GIs and antiwar vets, the side I supported was the Vietnamese resistance, people like the Vietnamese guerrilla Kerry killed in that now notorious firefight, but he wasn't running for president in 2004, and he had almost as little chance of winning as Nader.

The symbolic power internationally of brooming . Bush was undeniable; it meant at best an antiwar vote (and I think Kerry would have done better if he had run an explicitly antiwar campaign); at the very least a vote for Kerry was a vote of no confidence. I think radicals had nothing to lose by taking a few minutes to vote and something to gain from Bush's defeat. Even if Bush had lost, there would be further unprecedented catastrophe in Iraq and the Middle East generally.

I already argued in these pages after the 1992 elections that it is a mistake to treat electoral abstention as a rigid, reflexive dogma rather than as a flexible principle. In that article, I treated sympathetically a friend's desire to send Bush Daddy into retirement, especially given his crimes in Iraq, but I argued nevertheless for abstention, a refusal to participate in that spectacle. (See "Watching the Dogs Salivate: Notes on the 1992 Election," reprinted in *Against the Megamachine*, available from the FE Barn.)

But twelve years of barbarism have made a difference. Junior and his cronies represent a greater disaster and higher stakes. Taking some wind out of their sails, at such little cost to ourselves, seemed reasonable to me. I wish we had more power to stop them, and ultimately, we may. But we didn't then, and we haven't lately.

As I said in my essay in 1992, I think abstention is a worthy orientation, but I think it a mistake to make a fetish of it. Two elections in recent memory may suffice to make my point. In 1988, Augusto Pinochet held a plebiscite to affirm his rule, but the Chilean people voted against him (about fifty-five percent, hardly a landslide), bringing about an end to fascist rule. To have argued against voting at that moment would have been not only a terrible tactical mistake but also an insult to one's neighbors and to the victims of the regime. The Chileans didn't make a social revolution, but the consequences of their actions were serious and positive. Pinochet has not paid for his crimes, but he has not exactly lived a comfortable life since then, either.

In 1999, the people of East Timor voted overwhelmingly for independence, and subsequently suffered violence and massacres from the Indonesian military and gangs. And yet many testified afterward to having no regrets about voting. In Spain last spring, voting made a difference in throwing out Bush's conservative allies. My friends and comrades there went out and voted, and they tell me that the defeat of the right has opened up some paths and led to a new energy there.

We have always said that if voting made a difference, they would make it illegal; the voting fraud in 2000 and now again in 2004 suggests that this is what they are progressively doing. From the little I have read, anarchists supported the black freedom movement in the US in the 1950s and 1960s, remaining ambiguous (and probably ambivalent) about the voting question. I don't think there are simple answers to these questions.

A Bush defeat would have meant that even a slim majority of Americans were willing to act on a symbolic level to reject the regime's crusade in the Middle East, its oligarchic dismantling of reforms and tattered safety nets that were already stunningly inadequate, its triggering of apocalypse in accordance with its christian messianism, its shredding of civil liberties, its hatred for women's freedom, its refusal to live and let live with people of a different sexual orientation, its insistence that Vietnam was a noble cause betrayed by the antiwar movement.

Now that Kerry has lost (or stood by as the election was stolen), my conversations with coworkers and neighbors will be similar to what they would have been had he won.

The fascist fundamentalists are still out there, and because they won, they are more aggressive than ever. The war is killing thousands and making the world more dangerous for all of us. They are wrecking the planet. What now? The ruling parties will not save us. It is up to us to put an end to this, to create a new world. Voting won't do it.

I'll tell them what I told them before: OK, I tried your way on Tuesday, but whatever occurred on November 2, we need to think beyond those two minutes in the booth. What will you do today, next week, and for the rest of your life?

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