



The Nader Dilemma



Feminists
or Nader/LaDuke
VOTE 2000

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Have you been hearing statements like these lately?

Nader can't possibly win; you're throwing your vote away if you vote for him.

Any vote for Nader is a vote stolen from Gore. Gore can't win if people vote for Nader.

If we don't get Gore in, Bush will win.

Therefore, if you vote for Nader, Bush will win; a vote for Nader is a vote for Bush.

If Bush gets in, he'll stack the Supreme Court with right-wing Christian conservatives and overturn *Roe vs Wade*.

Therefore, if you vote for Nader, abortion will become illegal, and it will be your fault.

Therefore every feminist has to vote for Gore.

To vote Nader is antifeminist. It's irresponsible.

Many progressives in America today are facing a crisis of conscience over their vote this November. A lot of people are disgusted with and disaffected from the Democratic Party; and some registered Republicans are also disgusted with their own party. The reasons are largely the same: the moral and intellectual poverty to which our two-party system has been

reduced, the blatant corruption practised by the politicians of both parties. For the progressive or liberal voter, the Democratic Party's rightward slithering over the last eight years, and the corporate ass-kissing lavishly indulged in during the Clinton presidency, have left depression and anger in their wake. Many people who voted for Clinton describe themselves as having been "betrayed," and they are looking for some kind of viable alternative, a way to cast their vote without completely violating their personal principles.

However, it's very difficult for a lot of us to figure out *how* to vote for our principles in this election. On one level, it seems perfectly simple. There's only one candidate out there for a progressive voter.

There is only one candidate who has anything concrete to say about any of the issues dearest to a progressive person's heart. Only Nader has any substantial platform at all when it comes to labour relations, the supralegal power of transnational corporations, the flight of capital from the US industrial sector; only Nader even admits that these things are major issues for large numbers of people. Only Nader has anything solid to say about environmental degradation; only Nader has any real stance on corporate domination of media, suppression of information, theft of the public airwaves, and many other very hot topics that are on our minds these days. We live in times when corporate power, not Federal or State power, is the most invasive and frightening new force in most people's lives; only Nader is even willing to admit that corporate power is anything but wondrous and benign.

And frankly, only Nader has any credibility or integrity. Like him or not, he's been consistently working for what he thinks is right for the last 30 years. He's never been bought off, bribed, suborned, co-opted, or watered down. He's never been caught with his pants down and a startlingly youthful campaign aide in his lap. And he's never been found with his pockets full of major stock holdings in

(Continued on page 2.)

companies he just said something nice about in public. For a fellow whose word carries a certain amount of weight, who has some degree of celebrity, a little media exposure, he behaves rather decently. Like an honest citizen, in fact, trying doggedly to work in the public interest.

What a concept eh? A public figure, engaged in political life, who actually behaves rather decently. After our last sorry 20 years of sex scandals, sell-outs, violations of the Constitution, shabby little wars serving shabby political agendas, and open bribery in high places, it seems almost too good to be true. Is this guy for real?

And it doesn't stop there: his running mate Winona LaDuke is (a) a woman, (b) a woman honoured by both *Ms* and *Time* for her leadership and vision, and (c) a Native American woman who makes strong and unambiguous public statements about indigenous land rights, the exploitation of women, environmental injustice, and the need to re-enfranchise the poor and marginalized people of this country in general. She's a co-founder of the Indigenous Women's Network, and she helped to lead a *successful* campaign that prevented the massively destructive James Bay large-hydro development in Canada. If Ivy League name-dropping impresses you, she just happens to be a Harvard-educated economist as well. The only woman we're used to seeing on the podium with a presidential candidate is a Candidate's Wife; Winona is a refreshing change.

Her speech at the Beijing International Women's Conference is a worthwhile read. To

They like to talk about women during an election year, but they actually don't seem to represent that through public policies that consider the long-term health conditions of women and children — whether it is on those basic levels or on the more insidious levels, the levels of the militarization of the society, violence against women, the chemicals that are in our ground water and in the air now.

—Winona LaDuke, *LaDuking It Out*, *Daily Special*, Friday, June 16, 2000

quote her very briefly on the subject of indigenous women, "We, collectively, find that we are often in the role of the prey to a predator society, whether for sexual discrimination, exploitation, sterilization, absence of control over our bodies, or being the subjects of repressive laws and legislation in which we have no voice." Gee, she sounds rather like a feminist to me.

Of course, at that same Beijing Conference, another politically visible woman from the US was speaking; Democrat Hillary Clinton stood up and said, "It is a violation of *human rights* when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution." In Iceland, on her speaking tour, she called for an end to the international trade in women's bodies. She has publicly condemned many abuses of women and girls. Hillary, in fact, has often sounded like a fairly reliable feminist when in front of a microphone. Pity she's not running as Gore's VP, right? Well, maybe.

When I consider how very little she has had to say about her husband's sexual misconduct, I get an uneasy feeling about her much-touted feminism. Let's suppose you can overlook or discount a charge of rape from 20 years ago; many feminists can't, but let's suppose for the moment that you can. It's harder to overlook the contemporary incidents, Clinton's sexual harassment of campaign and White House staff. Raving Republicans rightly pointed out that mainstream US feminists were in a strangely forgiving mood when Clinton committed offences even more blatant than Clarence Thomas's; and contributing to the chorus of No Comments and feeble defensiveness was Hillary herself. On the podium she can declaim a pretty good line about women's rights; but on the home front she hasn't the guts to divorce the guy for his repeated infidelities, or even to make a public statement critical of his lousy attitude to women. It's Stand By Your Man time, apparently, when we get too close to home. To paraphrase the immortal *Hitch-Hiker's Guide*, this is clearly some new meaning of the word 'feminist' with which I was previously unfamiliar.

So what's the point of this depressing digression? Hillary-bashing is pretty boring; I actually don't have it in for Hillary in particular, she's no worse than the average career

(Continued on page 3.)

politician and a bit better than some; and so I'll leave off being mean to her in just a moment. My point is that, just as with Gore's soi-disant environmentalism, Ms Clinton's feminism seems to be coming in a distant second to the advancement of her political career. In sharp contrast, Winona LaDuke's activism *is* her career. Just like Nader's activism *is* his career.

This is a significant difference, an important difference, for people who are feeling tired of the Democrats — tired of betrayal, tired of hearing high and inspiring rhetoric that turns out to be flak-written ad copy as sincere as a Hallmark card, talk that is never walked and was never meant to be. People who actually have principles and act on them — people like Winona and Ralph — are an attractive novelty these days. A breath of fresh air, in fact.

So it should be simple, right? Just vote for the guy who does walk his talk, the guy who has some brains, some ethics, some sincerity, genuine compassion for working people, genuine loyalty to fundamental ideals like justice and democracy, *and* a real live Outspoken Female Activist running mate who also walks *her* talk. Should be an easy call for the average feminist, no? But of course, in a rigged two-party system with a lot of big money on the table, it's never that simple. Nader's a third-party candidate, and we all know about third parties and the US electoral system.

It's easy to sum up the "reasons why Nader can't win." I've been hearing them recited lately in every tone of voice from dreary despondency to spittle-flecked ranting. The Greens don't have any money; he's got no media coverage; he entered the race too late; no third-party candidate has ever won a US election; he's not an insider and he hasn't been preparing for the last 20 years; he has no experience in elected office; he's too self-righteous; he's too smart, the American people won't like him; the public is stupid, they think everything is fine; everything *is* fine, there's no place for reformers in a fat and happy economy. And so on. I'm sure you've heard it all.

And to be honest, no matter how keen you are on the Greens, it's hard to believe confidently that they are going to rush up from behind and have a runaway victory at the eleventh hour. It would be great, it would be a priceless moment in history for us all to witness, but if you asked me to bet my life savings on it,

I wouldn't. I'm not saying it is flat-out impossible; just that the odds are not real good.

This is why there's a crisis of conscience. If Nader seemed likely to win, there would be no question; every progressive in the country, and some maverick conservatives, would have their ballots all pre-marked right now. But if you think the Right Candidate can't win, or that the odds are bad anyway, then you're asking yourself, "Am I right to cast my vote for the Right Candidate? Or should I be using my vote for the Wrong Candidate, just to shore up the wall against the Worst Candidate?" And that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, has to be the Shrub, Dubya, the Lord High Executioner of the Lone Star State. (Now, I don't really have to tell you everything that's wrong with Dubya, right? If you haven't figured it out, go read Molly Ivins' book.)

When Democrats sit down to tell you why you really should vote for Gore instead of Bush, there's an awkward pause. What can you say about Gore, really? I mean, what's to like?

Gore's lost any credibility he had as an "environmentalist." As many have quipped, it's as if he never *read* that book of his, let alone wrote it. He sat there in DC with his fearless leader Mr Clinton and said "Nuffin" while our national forests were (are!) being sold off at bargain basement prices to clearcutters; while our environmental protection laws were bent and broken for the convenience of corporate profit-hounds; while Detroit thumbed its nose

(Continued on page 4.)

Green goals aim at preserving the commonwealth of assets that the people of the United States already own so that the people, not big business, control what they own, and using these vast resources of the public lands, the public airwaves and trillions of worker pension dollars to achieve healthier environments, healthier communities and healthier people.—

—Ralph Nader, 2000
Greens acceptance speech

at air quality standards and fuel conservation; Mr "Environmentalist" Gore reliably had Nuffin to say every time. The US continued to pout and drag its feet in world environmental councils and negotiations over greenhouse gases and global warming; Mr Gore said and did Nuffin to change our national stance. SUVs take over our roads, 30 thousand Americans die every year from air pollution; Mr Gore says and does Nuffin.

Now, here you have a guy who goes to all the trouble, *prior* to an election, to write a book (or have one written for him) telling us all how concerned he is about our planetary environmental crisis. Then *after* he gets elected — when he's actually in a position of high office, with the ear of the media and the spotlight on his desk — he says Nuffin so loudly that you can hear the trees falling in the distant forests. You gotta wonder about that guy's campaign promises this time around. You're gonna trust this known poseur and liar?

This pretty much leaves his defenders and his party with Nuffin to say also; but they have one trump card. Bush is so awful. Bush is so scary. Bush is even *more* corrupt, even *more* cosy with corporate power, than Gore. Gore's pro-death penalty? Yeah, but Bush actually seems to get a kick out of signing the warrants. Gore's a born-again who thinks gays are "abnormal"? Yeah, but Bush's right-wing Christian buddies make Gore look like a Unitarian Universalist. Gore's a rich boy from a rich family with investments in companies who are messily involved in our international policy? Yeah, but wait till you see what the Bush clan and their interests add up to. Gore's a bit of a liar, a touch of the sleazebag? You ain't seen

nothin' folks, Bush is the Godfather himself, with a colourful fantasy life as Attila the Hun. There's just one wonderful, irresistible, charming, delightful, untarnished thing about Gore: he isn't Bush.

We may remain kind of unconvinced. These are differences of *degree* we're talking about here, not differences of *kind*. Is he really all that different? Is one rich dishonest guy much different from any other rich dishonest guy? Would a Bush regime be able to accelerate and encourage corporate mergers and the consolidation of power and wealth any faster than the Clinton regime has? Would a Bush invasion of Iraq have killed even more civilians? Would a Bush embargo of Iraq be killing even more people than Clinton's still is? Could a Bush regime possibly waste even more money than Clinton is wasting on the pathetic sequels to Star Wars?

Would a Bush refusal to discuss electoral reform be any more final than Clinton's was? If a Bush administration sites a toxic waste dump in your town, is it any more toxic than if Gore put it there — as Clinton did in Ohio, after promising voters there that he would not — ? Are 45 million Americans without health care any more without health care if Bush is president, than they already are under Clinton? And are the homeless people any more homeless under Bush than they are now under Clinton, or than they would be under Gore? How can they have less than they've got, when they've got Nuffin?

Will Bush's presumable outright refusal to allow us access to RU-486 be substantially different from Clinton's or Gore's 8-year foot-dragging and temporizing in making it available to US women? Either way, we still don't have access to it. A difference that makes no difference, as the old saying goes, *is* no difference.

But no, there's a difference, there's this one difference, insist the Gore defenders. There's just this one difference you can't brush off. Say what you will about them, the Democrats still defend a woman's right to choose.

Specifically, Gore's advocates say that Bush, if elected, will promptly pack the Supreme Court with Bible-thumping Neanderthals who will do their damndest to speed up the erosion of women's right to safe and legal abortions (an

(Continued on page 5.)

My mother told me several years ago that when Nader was on Phil Donahue, someone asked him why he never got married. Nader joked that he's married to General Motors but later got serious and said, "Because I'm very dedicated to my vocation and it wouldn't be fair to dump the child care on someone else." Nader then got a standing ovation.

—Kathleen Trigiani

erosion which hasn't slowed down noticeably during Clinton's Democratic presidency, we have to note in passing). At least Clinton devoted some FBI resources to protecting clinics from mad right-wing assassins. Reagan just grinned vacantly and looked the other way, and Bush will do the same. Worse, Bush owes favours to some very rich people with some very weird ideas about women's rightful place in the world. "Afghanistan isn't that far away," as one very sincere gentleman wrote to me recently. Keep an eye on those Promise Keepers, folks, and dust off your copy of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

So here's the rub. Obviously the Democrats, running scared with a candidate who's barely saleable (except to corporate backers, of course), need to capture some electorate. Time to woo the women's vote (gee, have we seen this happen before?) or rather, to threaten it, to browbeat it, to bully women into voting for Gore by painting an apocalyptic picture of what will happen if we don't.

If Bush wins, say the Democratic honchos and honchas, *Roe* will be overturned. Abortion will once again be illegal in the US. (And if you take the "Afghanistan" fellow literally, this will shortly be followed by a loss of the franchise, imposition of the veil, deprivation of medical care, stonings in the streets, and purdah.) And it will be all your fault if you didn't vote for Gore. You will be personally responsible for every woman who dies from some lousy self-induced or back-alley abortion, because you irresponsibly and stupidly threw your vote away when you could have helped us to fight the Antichrist!

On the other hand: if the Green party doesn't get at least five percent of the national vote, they will lose their chance to get at least \$12 million in matching funds from the Federal government to use in 2004. Without some more capital to buy some more media coverage and to fuel some more outreach, the Greens are going to have a hard time keeping it together. The two-party system that's stifling US political life, keeping this country in a state of social stagnation and under the thumb of an almost-hereditary ruling class, is really tough to crack. The Greens need those votes, to get that money, to strengthen their party, to give us

some kind of freedom of choice in future elections. Or we could be stuck with these same two rich-people's-parties for another how many years?

If we cast our votes for Gore then we do, in a sense, tacitly endorse the rule of the super-rich, the blatant corruption, the warmongering, the lying-cheating-and-stealing that has distinguished our most recent Democratic presidency only slightly less than that of its Republican predecessor. Not appealing. Revolting, in fact. But if we cast a vote for Nader, we feel a sense of risk; will Bush win because of my vote?

I'm no Pollyanna myself. If Bush is elected, he *may* indeed pack the Supreme Court at the behest of his buddies and his bankrollers. They *may* indeed overturn *Roe*. If that happens, there will indeed be lives lost. There will be suffering. A certain number of American women will go to jail for providing or attempting abortions, a certain number will die from incompetent abortions. Wealthy women, of course, will continue to have access to safe abortions.

But under a Gore administration that continues along the lines dictated by Wall Street, the lines to which the Clinton administration has obediently hewn, millions of women will have no medical coverage to pay for an abortion; millions of women do not live near any of the few remaining hospitals that offer abortion services in the US. Wealthy and upper-middle-class women will continue to have access to safe abortions. Poor women and working class women will have unwanted children, or will risk their lives with amateur abortions or quack abortionists.

(Continued on page 6.)

I don't think government has the proper role in forcing a woman to have a child or forcing a woman not to have a child. And we've seen that around the world. This is something that should be privately decided with the family, woman, all the other private factors of it, but we should work toward preventing the necessity of abortion.

—Ralph Nader

Meet the Press, May 7, 2000

Looks like we have a choice between only wealthy women having access to safe abortions . . . or both wealthy and well-off women having access to safe abortions. Real meaningful choice, eh? Talk about the lesser of two evils!

Here is my own moral dilemma. The freeing of women from brood-mare slavery hinges on women's ability to prevent pregnancy, and when necessary, to terminate unwanted pregnancy. I'm not denying for one second that this is a fundamental feminist issue. But surely it's not a fundamental feminist solution to ensure this freedom only for women above a certain income level, preserving "rights" which in practise only the wealthy and the well-off can exercise.

What does it mean to define this constrained choice — between access to safe abortions for a slightly narrower, or a slightly broader, set of fairly privileged American womanhood — as the only choice that matters? Does it take priority over all other considerations of social justice for all American women? and what about all those people in other countries in the world as well, whose lives are affected, often ruined, by American commercial empire, aka our foreign policy? As feminists, can we persuade ourselves to vote for the continuation of our government-by-wealth which yearly condemns hundreds of thousands of people to death, millions to privation and disease? When we recall that *women* are foremost among those millions?

One of those critical responsibilities is to ensure that our children are well cared for. This is an enormous undertaking because our children are now exposed to the most intense marketing onslaught in history. From the age of 9 months to 19, years precise corporate selling is beamed directly to children separating them from their parents, an unheard of practice formerly, and teaching them how to nag their beleaguered parents as unpaid salesman for companies. There is a bombardment of their impressionable minds.

—Ralph Nader, 2000
Greens acceptance speech

When we are told that Gore is the only candidate for the feminist voter to consider, are we *really* being told that Gore is the only candidate for the wealthy or upper-middle-class feminist voter? I have to wonder. And I have to admire the political savvy of the boys who have managed to back us into this corner.

Working-class feminists, poverty activists, or feminists who feel a loyalty to all women regardless of class, are being put in an invidious situation here; asked to ignore all other considerations, betray our loyalty to the working class and the poor, postpone all our concerns about peace, justice, and planetary survival, and vote the corporate ticket in order to preserve access to abortion for what looks more and more like a privileged few among us in either case. A larger privileged few with access to legal abortions, or a very tiny privileged few with access to top-dollar illegal ones; is this a difference that makes no

(Continued on page 7.)

When Americans go to work . . . wondering who will take care of their elderly parents or their children . . . aghast at how little time your frenzied life leaves you for children, family, friends and community, overcome by the sheer ugliness of commercial strips and sprawls and incessantly saturating advertisements, repelled by the voyeurism of the mass media and the commercialization of childhood, upset at the rejection of the wisdoms of our elders and forebears, anxious over the ways your tax dollars are being misused, feeling that there needs to be more to life than the desperate rat race to make ends meet, then think about becoming a part of a progressive movement of Greens, of this citizens' campaign, to change the political economy so that healthy environments, healthy communities, and healthy people become its overwhelming reason for being.

—Ralph Nader, 2000
Greens acceptance speech

difference? Or is the upholding of *Roe* essential, no matter how restricted the numbers of women actually able to exercise the legal right it protects?

What's *Roe* worth to ya? That's what the Dems are asking us, with cynical confidence, holding *Roe* hostage for our complicity in their other crimes against women.

As feminists we are used to, and sick'n'tired of, the call to "postpone" our feminist agenda in the urgency of a larger cause. If the Democratic candidate for office is anti-abortion, or ignores the issue (remember McGovern?) we're supposed to vote for him anyway; after all, it's "selfish" to put specific women's issues ahead of national issues like stopping the war or fighting poverty — and of course we mustn't let those Republicans win!

In other words, if abortion rights are not what the Dems are selling in any particular election, then both personal and media bullying will be directed against this particular feminist priority, stigmatizing feminists for having too narrow a political vision. But when it's the only card they have left to play, all of a sudden the Dems are more-feminist-than-thou-ing it all over the op/ed pages, telling us that the *one and only* issue on which we should base our voting decision is the preservation of *Roe*.

That's today. Today, when the Democrats instruct women in how we should vote, the call is to narrow and specialize our feminist agenda to one issue, to make that our only cause. We are now being wooed as a single-issue special interest group, and the larger polity be damned.

But we have known for decades that feminism is by its nature *not* a "special interest" politics, but a consistent and inclusive political and ethical stance. Women come in all colours, so racism is a feminist issue. Women bear the greatest burden, suffer the most, in poverty and deprivation; so poverty is a feminist issue. Women are consistently underpaid, sexually harassed on the job, denied promotion, exploited; so labour rights are a feminist issue. Women suffer most in war-stricken countries; peace is a feminist issue. Women's reproductive systems are sensitive to persistent toxins; environmental degradation is a feminist issue. Women make less money than men, and are slipping into poverty faster than men; affordable health care and housing are feminist

issues. Women are mothers, or at least all mothers are women; child care, child support, and quality of life for children are feminist issues.

There is hardly any social justice issue that does not bear directly upon women and therefore rightfully engage the attention of feminists. Even the corporate new world order, the malfeasance of the IMF and World Bank, the machinations of the WTO, all bear harder on women around the world; it is the women who are locked into the sweatshops, exploited in the brothels, exported as mail order brides. The prevailing GNP/GDP method of assessing and reporting national wealth and productivity erases women's work and women's worth; even the way governments do their book-keeping is a feminist issue. Feminists have been writing and campaigning and struggling on all these fronts for decades.

And on all these issues, the Democrats have failed and failed and failed again. They have refused to treat women and women's rights as anything but expendable and irrelevant, very low indeed on the priority list as compared to really important stuff like corporate profit and political gamesmanship. We are being asked to vote for people who have betrayed us time and time again. They got some nerve, these guys.

Anyway, what the Democrats are asking of — or demanding from — women voters today is to forget every feminist issue except *Roe*. If you vote for us, for the corporate establishment, they tell us — if you are good girls — we will not take *Roe* away. But you must not disobey your kindly masters by voting for that other guy. (You know, the guy who actually has something substantive and positive to say on all those *other* feminist issues, the guy who actually takes women seriously enough to share the

(Continued on page 8.)

Do we wish to lift the horizons of the pursuit of happiness in our society through the pursuits of justice so that bigotry, discrimination and virulent intolerance recedes toward oblivion?

—Ralph Nader, 2000
Greens acceptance speech

rostrum with one... and by the way, who supports abortion rights as well.) If you disobey us, the not-so-kindly masters will get into power and then you'll really catch hell.

Well, no matter how angry we may feel about this hectoring from people who have betrayed us time and again, it's not an easy call.

Bush is evil, that's pretty obvious. Gore is almost as evil, that's also pretty obvious. They're both rich boys who don't give a damn about anything but how their investments and their friends' investments are doing — that's glaringly obvious. Any comparison with these two white-collar criminals makes Nader come away looking like Honest Abe Lincoln — also pretty obvious. But alas, it doesn't end there.

If you believe the Doomsayers for Gore, then the choice you're faced with as a feminist voter is a classic moral dilemma. It's the moral dilemma of, let's say, the Resistance fighter.

You know the scenario, right? You've read about occupied France or occupied Viet Nam or occupied Anywhere. Or at least you've seen the movies. Your country is occupied by Bad Guys. You want to run away and join the Resistance — join the underdogs, fight the good fight, get a few licks in at the people who are ruining your life and everyone else's. BUT. If you get caught and they find out who you are, they'll kill your entire family. They'll probably do some pretty nasty things to those you love before killing them; and that's not even counting what they're likely to do to you.

As long as most of us on the Left keep voting Democratic, we'll be taken for granted and our agenda will get the heave-ho. I mean, they keep promising to lay off the sauce and quit beating us up and bring home their paycheck every Friday, and we keep giving them just one more chance, and they keep abusing us. Time to change the locks on the door and get that restraining order, I think. But could that leave us even worse off—like dead? Yes it could. The way you know you're oppressed is that all your options are lousy.

—John Burke, July, 2000

So you're in this moral dilemma; if you do what your conscience says is the right thing to do — join the resistance, make the gesture, take that potshot at the great and powerful — then you take the risk that you individually, or the resistance collectively, will lose. If you lose, your actions may bring harm to others that you care about. They may even blame you and hate you for having "caused" this harm. And your conscience also tells you that it's not fair for others to suffer for your actions. No matter what the Hollywood version says, the moral character of Resistance fighters is very much up for debate. Some of their surviving relatives and friends still see them as self-indulgent, egotistical wannabe heroes, making their grand gestures at everyone else's expense. Others simply see them as Heroes.

This is the moral dilemma which the doomsayers have set up for feminist and female voters. If you vote for Nader you are increasing, by your tiny little pico-percentage, the risk of a
(Continued on page 9.)

Russert: Environmental issues. Al Gore has written about them, is passionate about them. Would a President Gore not be better on those issues than President Bush.

Nader: Yeah, he probably would be better. But he wouldn't be much better. He would talk a lot better than Governor Bush. But what has Gore and Clinton done on solar energy? They've supported subsidies to fossil fuels and nuclear. They haven't really pushed the transformation of our country toward energy independence. We're importing more oil than ever before. They haven't spoken out on industrial hemp, let the farmers grow it. That could replace a lot of fuel...They have done very little on pesticides. And above all, they've given the auto companies a free ride. Eight years without any increased fuel efficiency standards. Reagan-Bush couldn't have done worse than that.

—Meet the Press, August 6, 2000

Bush victory; and if Bush wins *and* all the threats that are made about his winning come true, then women could be deprived of legal abortions; and that would definitely be harm to people you care about. Yet, the other horn of the dilemma is also a sharp pointy one: if you vote for Gore, you are endorsing a corrupt and increasingly repressive political system which is *also* harming women here and abroad, and you are diminishing the chance of any successful challenge to that system ever being possible, by weakening the showing of the Green party in this historic election. There's a lot of money for the Green party riding on this vote.

Did you think I was going to tell you how to vote? You gotta be kidding. I wouldn't presume to do that. All I'm trying to work out here, for my sake as much as anyone else's, is the nature of the Nader Dilemma. I'm trying to summarize all the smoke and flames and competing claims, and bring it down to the bare bones of the issues. People are feeling very, very passionate about this, you know. There are progressive-type people who think Nader should just get the hell out of the race — now this is a real tribute to the political deadlock that the corporate backers have engineered here, when progressives want the only progressive candidate to drop out!. There are also progressive-type people who are trying to get every person they know to vote for Nader.

Through television, the Internet stores, samples and mailings, these companies convey their message to the little ones. They teach them how to crave junk food, thrill to violent and pornographic programming, interact with the virtual reality mayhem. The marketeers are keenly aware of the stages of child psychologies, age by age, and know how to turn many into Pavlovian specimens powered by spasmodically shortened attention spans as they become ever more remote from their own family.

—Ralph Nader, 2000
Greens acceptance speech

Both are equally sincere. Friendships are being endangered here, heated rhetoric is being exchanged. It's the most exciting election in years, actually.

It all comes back down to the original argument at the head of this article. You have to figure out how convinced you are by each item on the list, and how you assess your particular voting situation. (Just for fun, I tried to come up with a fairly brief response to each item on that list — the soundbite version of this lengthy essay!) Aside from the cynical Democrat spinmeisters who are just trying to bully you into voting for Their Guy, there are lots of good people out there who are deeply convinced by the "Nader Kills *Roe*" argument, and they will quite sincerely tell you that voting for Nader is antifeminist.

Obviously, I personally don't believe this. If I did, I wouldn't be writing about a dilemma, because there wouldn't be any dilemma (in my mind anyway). If voting for Nader were patently antifeminist, no one would be agonizing over this decision. But to cast a vote for the only candidate with a social justice platform, the only candidate who addresses such a long list of issues all affecting the quality of women's lives — this can hardly be called "antifeminist". To vote for Nader means that you've wrestled with the dilemma, and with difficulty decided that you think that supporting the Green Party *now*, despite a degree of risk, is the best investment you can make in a decent future for women in this country and elsewhere in the world. No one can do more with her (or his) vote than that.

(Continued on page 10.)

Do we want our own media, our own television, radio and cable networks as a functioning and deliberative democracy desires and needs? Do we want to reserve part of the public airwaves which the people own in the first place for programming that reflects our solutions, our cultures, our sense of the heroic and the many models of little known success that need to be publicized and emulated?

—Ralph Nader, 2000
Greens acceptance speech

A VOTE FOR NADER IS A VOTE FOR BUSH: THE REPLY

May we recommend the whole text of the 'Nader Dilemma' article on Page 1? This is a very condensed version, just a soundbite really.

Nader can't possibly win; you're throwing your vote away if you vote for him.

Given the nature of chaotic systems like markets and popular votes, "can't possibly" is a mathematical misstatement; "is highly unlikely to" would be more correct. The nature of large chaotic systems is that you cannot predict them; no one can! Something unexpected is always possible. But I would not quarrel with anyone who said that a Green Party victory in this election would be very surprising — delightful, but very surprising.

Any vote for Nader is a vote stolen from Gore. Gore can't win if people vote for Nader.

Here we are on shakier ground. There are many states in which either Gore or Bush is so darned far ahead that the other guy is already toast. In these states, a few votes for Nader are not going to hurt Gore, and will definitely help the Greens. In fact, in a state where there's little-to-no hope of a Gore victory, every Democrat of progressive principles might as well vote for Nader. In states where the two are close, the

polls are focussing on "likely to vote" or "previously voted" registered voters. But there are a lot of people, maybe about 25 percent of the public, who usually don't bother to exercise their voting rights because they are so disgusted with both parties. If that 25 percent felt inclined to vote for Nader, it wouldn't affect Gore's tally at all; they wouldn't have voted for Gore anyway. And some of those who are switching to the Green Party are disaffected Independents and even a tiny handful of Republicans. These voters also don't subtract from Gore's score, in fact the Reps subtract from Bush's in their tiny maverick way.

If we don't get Gore in, Bush will win.

Well, there are only 4 candidates. We hope we can disregard the lunatic Right. That leave 3 real contenders; but many expert observers feel that Nader cannot be considered a real contender. Some of these are just talking heads for corporate media, but others are expert analysts on the Left. There is difference of opinion even between people with very similar beliefs and principles; Kathe Pollitt vs Alexander Cockburn, for example. As things look today, it's a race between two contenders, not three; but whether things two months from now will look exactly the same is anyone's guess.

(Continued on next page.)

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(Continued from page 10.)

Therefore, if you vote for Nader, Bush will win; a vote for Nader is a vote for Bush.

See above. In a state with a very close race between Republican and Democrat, a registered Democrat who switched to Green Party affiliation and voted Nader might directly contribute to a Bush victory. In a state where the race is already over, or for the voter who hasn't voted for the last 15 years, it's not that simple.

If Bush gets in, he'll stack the Supreme Court with right-wing Christian conservatives and overturn Roe vs Wade.

If Bush gets in, he'll start paying off his political and financial debts. Sheesh, he'll probably make the Clinton administration look clean. He will probably try to pay off debts and favours from the loony Right by appointing ultraconservatives to the court. But not all conservative appointees on the Court vote their party line at all times. Nor is it clear what the social repercussions of overturning Roe would be, and whether even such an egomaniac as Bush would be willing to face them. Whether Bush getting elected leads inevitably to an overturn of Roe is a matter of opinion.

Therefore, if you vote for Nader, abortion will become illegal, and it will be your fault.

This is obviously a reductio ad absurdum, but it's the heart of the moral dilemma. Obviously, if you live in a state where Bush has already won months before election day, and you vote for Nader, your vote would never have swung your state for Gore anyway; so you can only laugh when people start firing the guilt-gun in your general direction. If you live in a state where it's running very close, then you're definitely in the Maximum Dilemma Group. But even so, in the humble opinion of this writer, it will not be your personal fault that an evil and corrupt man backs a repressive and hateful ideology; evil and corrupt men have been doing just

this for hundreds of years, and it has never been the victims' fault, no matter how many people have tried to prove that it was.



www.nostatusquo.com/Nader/

Every feminist has to vote for Gore. To vote for Nader is antifeminist.

To vote for the only candidate with a real social justice platform — the only candidate in sight with a female running mate — the only candidate who is not wholly owned by corporate backers; this can hardly be called "antifeminist". To vote for Nader means that you've wrestled with a dilemma, and with difficulty decided that you think that supporting the Green Party now, despite a degree of risk, is the best investment you can make in a decent future for women in this country. No one can do more with their vote than that. Those who vote for Gore, because they have come to a different conclusion after wrestling with the dilemma, are also trying to do their best. It would be foolish to say (as the Democrats and the pundits surely will) that a Gore victory implies the wholehearted support of the American people for another four years of presidential malfeasance, corporate domination, and rich folks generally running riot... or that the war on Colombia will be all your fault because you voted for Gore. That kind of blame-throwing is silly.

Most feminists who vote for Gore will do so, figuratively speaking, with a gun held to their heads. The questions for all of us now are, Is the gun loaded or not? and How do I feel about voting with a gun held to my head?

—D.A. Clarke

(Continued from page 9.)

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Thanks to that tremendously creative troublemaker, instigator and rabble-rouser Nikki Craft, who coerced me into writing this essay.

—D.A. Clarke

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**THIS TIME
YOU HAVE
A CHOICE**



Essay by D. A. Clarke, July 2000

Written for **Feminists for Nader**

<http://www.nostatusquo.com/Nader/index.html>

Send responses and comments to the author
c/o votenader@nostatusquo.com

If you are interested in what feminists and profeminists have to say who are actually planning to vote for Nader, visit the personal comments page: <http://www.nostatusquo.com/Nader/guestbook.html>

Some other links relevant to the Nader Dilemma:

A good Nader campaign website:
www.nader2000.org/



A Vote for Nader is *Not* a Vote for Bush by
Alexander Cockburn of *The Nation*:

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/072000-104.htm>

Bush and Gore Make Me Wanna Ralph by
Michael Moore:

<http://www.michaelmoore.com/07192000.html>

Interview with Winona LaDuke by Alicia
Montgomery of *Salon*:

<http://www.salon.com/politics/feature/2000/07/13/laduke/index.html>

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