

Abortion, Feminism And My Vote FOR Nader

by Nikki Craft
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In 1972 I registered to vote for the first time. I was 21 years old. For months before the election I leafleted against the war, went to rallies, and turned in 6,000 petitioned signatures to the Dallas Peace Committee for the Hatfield/McGovern amendment to end the war in Viet Nam.

That election year I registered my friends and neighbors to vote for George McGovern; when voting day came, it was discovered that I substantially helped convince a once conservative, East Dallas, Republican precinct to vote majority liberal Democrat for the first time, ever. As a

delegate to that year's Democratic convention, I was more than discouraged to see how electoral and party politics really operated. That was nearly thirty years ago, and I thought I would never vote again.

Over those three decades I have been a full time dedicated political activist committed to *not* voting, on principle. Four months ago I never thought I could ever make it through to November 8th, maddened at the boredom of the TV election blather, pundits and media manipulation. Then Ralph Nader stepped onto the scene and announced he was running for president and had chosen a woman running mate, Winona LaDuke. It became apparent he was a serious candidate. Nader was intelligently funny, and his politics were broader and better than ever before. I've always been an admirer of his and have always trusted that he, unlike other public figures and especially politicians, would never be for sale. He's not co-optable, and his actions, tested over many years as a true public servant, have earned my trust. I've been watching very carefully, and he's never once let me down.

I became cautiously involved in the election, organizing Feminists for Nader. I've created a major website in support of him and Winona (<http://www.nostatusquo.com/Nader/>) and ended up networking and organizing with the most wonderful progressive activists in the country. They've given me some small hope that there is the potential for a viable, truly progressive movement against corporate America.

Last month I finally registered, and vote I did — just last week, early — for Ralph Nader. I voted

straight Green party. It was a protest vote against the Democratic-liberal-feminist pressure to cave in to corporate rule. For the last four years the national "feminist leadership" in the U.S.



has stood by a sexual harasser, alleged rapist, and proven liar (Mr President Bill Clinton). Now these same women have the unmitigated gall to accuse Ralph Nader of having an ego problem!

My vote was a protest vote against Gloria Steinem, who proudly supports a religious fundamentalist (from the number of times he used God in his acceptance speech I would personally categorize him as a religious fanatic) Vice Presidential candidate who, as an Orthodox Jew, is part of a denomination that discriminates against women's equality and restricts women in certain participation. Steinem supports the right-wing-to-center, enemy of affirmative action, Joe Lieberman (no matter how genuinely personally nice the man may be) over Nader's outspoken, politically savvy *woman* running mate, Winona LaDuke. Shame on you, Gloria.

Gore assures us he's his own man and he won't stand silently by while special interests prevail. Yet when Clinton was accused of rape by Juanita Broaddrick, Gore never said one word, didn't even

bother to listen to her testimony. For that reason alone I would never vote for Al Gore. If he will stay quiet in the midst of all we saw come down with Bill Clinton, for his own self interest he'll stay quiet for *any* kind of injustice and corruption. After the impeachment Gore stood by Clinton introducing him as the president that history would look upon as great. As a feminist I have a policy that I don't align with, or vote for, sex abusers or their enablers no matter what the "higher cause", and I have to distrust any "feminist leadership" that expects me to.

I cast a protest vote against Patricia Ireland, for calling Nader willfully ignorant about violence against women, when it was her, and her smug and arrogant smile, who appeared on all those evening cable talk shows to discredit the women who named her man Bill Clinton as a sex harasser and rapist.

It was a protest vote against Democratic strategist Naomi Wolf, paid up to \$15,000 a month to advise Clinton/Gore on how to cover their tracks, how to re-manufacture themselves to manipulate women for their votes. Wolf advised Clinton, during the Monica Lewinsky scandal, that voters would forgive him if he acted in a more "fatherly" way, that America is searching for a benevolent father figure. According to Time Magazine, Wolf has argued within the campaign that Gore is a 'beta male' who needs to take on the 'alpha male' in the White House before the public can accept him as president. According to a recent poll, half the women in the U.S. (perhaps this is part of the problem) claim they are "feminists" ("Both Major Candidates Are Ignoring Women's Issues", Los Angeles Times, Nov. 3, 2000) and these days what can pass for "feminism" is anyone's guess. I certainly never cease to be amazed at how diluted and meaningless the term has become. But if this is how the U.S. feminist elite are calling it now, I'll take Nader's honest pro-justice politics any day.

I cast my protest vote against NARAL for failing to mention that the Democratic Party held a majority in the US Senate when Clarence Thomas' appointment was confirmed 52-48; that the Democratic party held a majority in the U.S. Senate when Scalia's appointment was confirmed; that when the U.S. Senate confirmed Scalia the vote was 98-0; that Gore and Lieberman both voted to confirm Scalia and that NARAL's man Gore voted for the

Hyde amendment, denying abortions to poor women. Juxtapose what high standards they try to hold us to with all their back room wheeling and dealings, frittering away our rights to control our bodies. Chip. Chip. Chip. Chip.

I don't take women's right to abortion lightly, and neither does Ralph Nader. Yes, Bush, and especially Cheney, do terrify me and they have in mind to do a lot of damage. But, no, I don't agree that a vote for Nader is a vote for Bush. As with propaganda, no matter how many times the lie is repeated, it doesn't transform it into the truth either. I've earned the right to cast my vote for whom I please and I've earned the right to speak on the issue of abortion with credibility. I signed the first Ms. Magazine petition to legalize abortion and in that same year, 1969, I had an illegal abortion myself. I would have another. I organized to legalize abortion in the U.S. in the late 60's, early 70s. I marched in Austin, Texas back then, and I've marched other places since. The right to abortion is a basic health care right, one that I (and other women) are well prepared to fight on the streets for once again if that should ever become necessary. And I don't appreciate any double bind insinuation from anyone that my vote — *my choice* of the candidate I want to support — *my right* — will hold me responsible for the overturn of Roe vs. Wade because of all the evil Supreme Court justices Bush might appoint. Now that's anti-choice!

Despite all the threats by NOW, NARAL and the Democrats, the recent history of the Supreme Court suggests that it is very hard to guess how the Court will go on the issue of abortion, because once justices are confirmed they are accountable to no one. Bork was denied confirmation despite views much less controversial than all these rabid anti-abortionists we're now being threatened with. O'Connor and Souter, despite their Republican appointments, have turned out pro-choice decisions by anyone's standards. Earl Warren was an appointee of the Republicans, many of whom later called him a traitor. Even pro-choice justices have gone on record saying they thought Roe vs. Wade was a bad decision, the wrong way to ensure abortion rights. I agree. Abortion should be a right of a woman to control her own body and a right to health care, not a privacy right cloaked in the red, white and blue flag waving language of "choice".

However, if Scalia and his cronies ever do manage to engineer a majority ruling that overturns women's rights to abortion then the blood will be on their hands — Al Gore's, Lieberman's, the Democrats' since they voted to confirm him — and not Ralph Nader's.

Nader has an impressive history of consistently opposing right-wing nominations for the Supreme Court, including Haynesworth, Carswell, Bork and, yes, Scalia and Thomas. Nader has never backed any such reactionary politician, judge, or policy that would — by their own standards — limit a woman's right to abortion. He has said over and over again that for American women, the right to a safe, affordable and legal abortion is a legal right, and that the government has no business telling a woman to have, or not to have, a child.

Nader wants poor women to have legal access to abortions, too; that's more than the other candidates are willing to promise, much less live up to. It's also more than our "feminist leadership" (bought long ago by big-money-Democrat interests) can live up to either. In this election, only Nader is talking much about poverty. Feminist Democrats, including Gloria Steinem, supported Jimmy Carter; he said he was anti-choice and would cut off funding for poor women's abortions — and he did. The Democrats, again with the complicity of our "feminist leadership," taken with their party invitations to Clinton dinners, demolished welfare under Clinton/Gore — and no one has bothered to find out what's happened to the women this affected. Yes, let's do think about the weakest among us, Ms. Steinem.

So Gore has changed his position from pro-life to pro-choice, perhaps opportunistically, perhaps not. In any event, he has already made several bad decisions that have had serious repercussions for women. Maybe he will do better next time? Well, Gore's "maybe" doesn't justify the self-righteous slandering of Nader and his supporters, who are deeply concerned about all of women's choices, not just reproductive.

Reproductive choices are an outgrowth of many, many choices — and rights — women have. It's not JUST about the Supreme Court. It's about jobs, about harassment, about a culture that demeans and devalues us as a class, about a culture that promotes violence against women, about a culture that puts profits ahead of people. Nader has

demonstrated a life-long commitment to choices for everyone, not just for corporations. "Choice" for Gore is just a cynical, patriotic-sounding buzzword he uses to cover his failings.

When progressive women vote for the big money parties instead of Ralph Nader, it makes me sad. Under the banner of "keeping abortion legal," the Democrats are jerking women around and manipulating us, trying to exploit the little bit of political power that women are allowed, trying to get us to subvert our own general political interests, in favour of a single issue. We're being wheedled and bullied in the public and electoral domain in much the same way as we would be (were abortion to become illegal) coerced in our private relationships and individual lives. It's someone else's agenda we're being recruited for, whether as involuntary breeders or frightened voters.

All around, the manipulation is shameless and there's fuzzy politics going on everywhere. Nader supports the rights of Gays/Lesbians/Bisexuals/and the Transgendered to marry and adopt children. Nader supports equal rights and equal responsibilities for LGBTs. Yet, sadly, many gays and lesbians are attacking Nader and propping up, instead, their rich, privileged and v-e-r-y heterosexual male candidates. Have we forgotten what happened back in '92? The Clinton/Gore administration promised to end the hypocritical policies towards gays in the military. But within three months of being elected, they caved in to the forces of bigotry and introduced the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which was universally condemned by gays and their supporters. Now we are being told that if Bush is elected, he will maintain that policy, so we better vote for Gore, who promises to support gay interests. This may be a first, being asked to vote against someone for supporting your own candidate's policies.

My vote for Nader was a protest vote against Gore; a protest vote against the Democratic party machine. It was a vote *for* Ralph Nader, and *for* real progressive political change, and *for* the (perhaps last-ditch) hope for a new radical grassroots movement in the U.S. For the first time in my life, my vote really meant something to me; for the first time I voted for the candidate of *my* choice who represents MY political views. It was a truly **EXHILARATING** feeling to vote for Ralph Nader.

Most of us know the feeling of walking out of a voting booth and feeling compromised, besmirched, always having to vote for "the evil of two lessers". But my vote this year was something special; something that might only come along a few times in one lifetime. As Nader said a few nights ago at a rally in Madison (quoting George McGovern), the only wasted vote is one where you vote for someone you don't believe in.

I thank Ralph Nader and the Greens for doing all the work it took to allow me, and others, to have these feelings of hope and exhilaration, to have a real choice. I thank them for hanging in there despite many sordid and disappointing attempts to vilify one of the most honorable men our society has produced. I thank them for their courage to stand up to what must be tremendous pressure to knuckle under. Their courage has been commendable, and exemplary, and that's what it's going to take. Their tenacity has been a surprise to everyone, especially Gore and the DEMs I'm sure — but for those of us directly involved as well. For the first time I feel a sense of security: that those involved in the upper echelons of this campaign are not going to sell our energies, our commitment, our time, and our trust down the river for the first basement bargain that might come along.

And about that issue of guilt come the morning after — when we're all ordering RU-486 off the internet (thanks to the Clinton/Gore administration for not getting us legal access to it in the U.S. after all these years) — which I'd rather do than suck up to these rich powerful white guys, anyway?

Neither Nader, nor anyone who votes for him — myself included — should, or will, accept the blame the Democrats will surely try to push off on us if Bush is elected. As Nader points out, no one is entitled to votes and the Democrats ought to get real. They damn sure ought to stop trashing Nader and his supporters (i.e. the real progressives in this country). This pattern of the Democrats calling those they don't like right wingers, no matter if they are themselves the more conservative and reactionary, is getting boring and irritating. The Democrats ought to divorce themselves from the arms merchants, the war-mongers, the corporate exploiters and polluters. They must stop backing anti-democratic and anti-labor organizations and legislation like GATT and NAFTA and the WTO.

The Democrats ought to either live up to their own traditional party values, or get out of the way and let Nader and LaDuke, or someone else, carry the flag. As Nader has pointed out over and over, if Gore can't get elected on his own merit then there's no one out there to blame but himself and the Democrats, for selling out such a large portion of their radical/left constituency. I'm just one, but there are others, and if the Democrats don't get their act together, there will be plenty more where we came from when the next election rolls around. We're relatively politically astute. We know corruption when we see it. We're watching carefully and we have long attention spans. We'll be the ones out on the streets pushing the pendulum swing equally against Bush or Gore, whoever is elected. We ain't into making deals. And now, guess what? We vote.

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Share this essay as you wish and if you plan to vote for Nader don't be bullied or intimidated into voting Democrat or Republican this election because you really do have a real choice for a change. Also see De Clarke's article entitled "The Nader Dilemma" at:

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

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