

File

# And the winner is ...

By Studs Terkel

**A**t the age of 88 I added my name to the Ralph Nader for President Committee. It caused an uproar among my surviving contemporaries. The dozens of letters had expletives I had hardly expected from these usually gentle folk. In effect, canes were furiously lofted, as swords held high; walkers were wielded as pikes and shields; wheelchairs were chariots of fire racing madly in my direction.

How dare I imperil the chances of Al Gore and insure the election of George W. Bush? A vote for Nader is a vote for the Texas trog. Imagine what will happen to the elders of this country, to the working people, to all the families whose health is not adequately insured? Dubya as president would be a catastrophe for the great many of us and a platinum parachute for the powerful few. I agree. Absolutely. Fortunately, that will not happen—thanks to the presence of Ralph Nader on the ballot.

The turning point of this campaign that transformed Gore from the colorless loser to the suddenly alive victor occurred on the night of his acceptance speech. It was not The Kiss.

## Is a vote for Nader a vote for the Texas trog?

The Al-Tipper smooch was as overwhelmingly irrelevant as our local tabloid's full front-page photo of Ronnie bussing Nancy. No, it was Gore's unexpected wallop at the malefactors of great wealth; his road-house punch at the corporate, powerful few putting the squeeze on the great many. It was still pretty mild in my book but did have the taste of Nader-Lite.

Do you for one moment think Al Gore would have sounded that militant tocsin, among other matters, such as better health care, the minimum wage, firm affirmative action and the phoniness of school vouchers? He, who hitherto had been an errand boy for the Big Boys almost as much as Dubya. Not on your tin-type. It was the fear of Nader's possible 5 percent that impelled Gore's spin doctors to add blood to his pallid being. Adopt Nader's platform, even if mildly so.

There is a precedent for this. I suggest that my indignant contemporaries remember—and the history-bereft young discover—a startling analogy. In 1948, Harry Truman confounded the pollsters in beating the highly favored Tom Dewey. How did this happen?

During the 1944 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, a little hack out of Missouri, errand boy for his Kansas City boss, Tom Pendergast, was foisted upon an ailing, dying FDR by the other political bosses, Ed Kelly of Chicago, Frank Hague of New Jersey and Dave Lawrence of Pennsylvania.

They convinced Roosevelt that he could not win with Henry Wallace (his vice president from 1940 to 1944). The simple truth is FDR would have won with an orangutan as his running mate. So, in the 1948 campaign, Wallace (who was secretary of Agriculture during the first eight years of the Roosevelt reign and had been the heart and soul of the New Deal) decided to run on the Progressive Party ticket for president. The cry from liberals as well as the party hacks was thunderous. A vote for Wallace is a vote for Dewey!

The turning point occurred when Truman took the advice of Clark Clifford: Tar Wallace with the Com-mie brush (the Cold War was just getting under way), but adopt his domestic program. That's when Truman took off after the Big Boys and "Give 'em hell, Harry" became the battle cry. On Election Day, 52 years ago, millions of Wallace supporters switched to Truman. Wallace wound up with a pitiful 1 million votes. (Strom Thurmond, running as a fourth-party candidate on a shameless racist platform, received 1 million votes as well, without lifting a finger.)

Shortly after the election, The Wall Street Journal editorialized: "It is said by political commentators that Mr. Wallace made a bad showing because he got few votes. What they neglect (to say) is that Mr. Wallace succeeded in having his ideas adopted. From the time that Mr. Wallace announced he would run for president, Mr. Truman began to suck the wind from Mr. Wallace's sails by coming out for more and more of the Wallace domestic program."

On Election Day 2000, I've a hunch that if it appears to be a squeaker, hundreds of thousands of possible Nader voters will switch to Gore and he will win handily. Nader may or may not get that 5 percent necessary for the funding of an honest-to-God third party (I, as an agnostic, invoke his name since it has become politically de rigueur these days.) Gore will be our next president and we may have to wait another four years for the emergence of a third party.

A caveat: If on the morning of Nov. 8 I should turn out to be dead wrong and Dubya, heaven forbid, is our president, I shall run for the hills, the chariots of fire in hot pursuit.

I probably won't be around, but the day will come when citizens in a Democratic society will call upon their native intelligence and no longer allow their lives to be trivialized by Little Leaguers.

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Illustration by Paul Lachner