

A letter on the situation in Palm Beach, Florida

20 November 2000

Dear Editor:

I just want to add a few observations to David Walsh's excellent reporting from Palm Beach County. (The *World Socialist Web Site* has, by the way, really outdone itself during this crisis in the US elections.)

I've been down in the West Palm Beach area for the past week, visiting my mother. My parents moved down here 19 years ago, so I have a little bit of experience in this part of Florida, garnered through annual visits. This area, self-contained and filled with retirement communities, glitzy malls, and cheap restaurants, has always seemed apart from the real world—like the village in the film *The Truman Show*.

Over the last seven days, however, reality has intruded. My mother, a retired civil service clerk, 86 years old and a lifelong Democrat, is one of the Jews in Palm Beach County who unwittingly voted for the neo-fascist Buchanan. She has already given an affidavit, along with several other retirees in her community, regarding the confusing “butterfly ballot.” Also, she has been invited to at least two demonstrations in downtown West Palm Beach. Never any kind of activist, she says that she would gladly go if she were younger. She clearly sees this as an attempt by the Republicans to steal her vote and subvert the system. She and the other retirees I spoke to down here, see themselves as intelligent, aware people—not as the poorly sighted, bumbling, clueless old folks badmouthed by the press and late-night comedians.

One elderly person who had just moved down from New York City a year ago remarked that it was particularly confusing to encounter the Palm Beach County ballot after having spent his adult life voting on a machine with levers, where there is little chance of making a mistake in selecting your nominee.

I also spoke with two emergency medical technicians (EMTs), town employees who were doing the weekly

routine of taking the blood pressure of the community's senior citizens. Both EMTs were experienced voters (one had been voting for 30 years). They said they felt cheated because the ballot might have caused them to vote for Buchanan.

Clearly, all these people take their democratic rights seriously. Unlike the media cynics, they do not regard the current electoral crisis as a “circus.” Many of them, like my mother, lived through the struggles in the 1930s that forced the government to give them the Social Security benefits they now live on. They feel that their right to vote is not something to be toyed with or ignored.

MJ

Cambridge, Mass.

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