

Republican "dirty tricks" in US mid-term elections

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With the second anniversary of the 2000 presidential election fast approaching, two recent political developments serve as a warning that the methods of fraud and conspiracy used to install George W. Bush in the White House are being employed in the run-up to the November mid-term congressional elections. The extreme right-wing faction that dominates the Republican Party is prepared once again to use extra-legal means, this time in an attempt to maintain the narrow Republican majority in the House of Representatives and prevent major Democratic gains in the Senate.

In New Mexico, state Republican Party Chairman John Dendahl admitted in mid-July that he had promised "at least \$100,000" to the state Green Party in exchange for the Greens fielding candidates in two of New Mexico's three congressional districts. His aim was to siphon votes from the Democrats in the 1st Congressional District, centering on Albuquerque, and the 2nd, in the southern part of the state. The Greens have achieved a modest measure of electoral success in New Mexico in the past, with vote totals as high as 5 percent statewide, and substantially more in some local areas.

The Greens refused Dendahl's offer, which they claimed amounted to as much as \$250,000, denouncing it as a "backroom deal." With a July 9 deadline for filing for minor party candidates, the Greens decided not to field candidates for the congressional seats.

State Democratic officials criticized Dendahl, calling for his resignation and for an investigation by the Federal Election Commission. The New Mexico attorney general, however, said there was no evidence of a violation of any state law. Patricia Madrid, a Democrat, said her office's probe of the matter showed "an attempt to manipulate the election process," but

that the offer was not illegal under state law.

Dendahl claimed he was acting merely as a "messenger" on behalf of an unnamed donor from the Washington, DC area, who was neither an elected official nor a member of the Republican National Committee. He claimed that he did not know the source of the money and was to be told only if the offer was accepted by the Greens. The Republican official made no further explanation or apology and dismissed suggestions that he step down. There was little coverage of this episode in the media nationally, nor any comment from national Democratic or Republican figures.

In another development, Republican officials in Michigan apparently recruited "stealth" candidates to run as phony Democrats for nine state Senate seats, all Democratic-controlled districts. The bogus candidates were set to run in the Muskegon, Kalamazoo, Bay City, Saginaw, Grand Blanc, Jackson, Midland, Port Huron and Trenton areas.

The *Muskegon Chronicle* and several other local papers exposed the plan after an 18-year old was recruited to run, but then changed his mind when he found out that he had been written in as a Democratic candidate. The planners had also apparently overlooked the minimum age for state Senate candidates, which is 21. The aim of this scheme was to confuse local voters and split the vote for the Democrats in the fall elections.

Michigan Republicans had at first denied responsibility for the scheme. After several weeks, State Senator Ken Sikkema finally acknowledged Republican involvement, attributing the operation to "overzealous staffers."

The Bush administration is following every political race in the country with extreme care, and top White

House advisers are working out the tactics. At stake in the mid-term elections is the balance of power between the two major parties, with the Republicans fearful that they could lose their present 11-vote majority in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, the Democrats prevail by a single seat, thanks to Vermont Senator James Jeffords leaving the Republican Party last year.

Faced with the continuing decline in the economy, increasing unease about plans for war against Iraq and a wave of corporate scandals possibly implicating Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and other top administration officials, the Republicans fear a backlash at the polls.

While bribery, fraud and other forms of “dirty tricks” are far from unprecedented in American bourgeois politics, the degree to which such methods have been employed in recent years to sidestep normal procedures is indicative of a profound decay of American democracy. The present maneuvers have special significance in light of the right-wing conspiracies to destabilize the Clinton administration, override the 2000 election result and install George W. Bush.

The Bush campaign and the Republican Party utilized the disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of voters to rig a paper-thin electoral victory in Florida that was upheld by a US Supreme Court decision scuttling a court-ordered recount. Having gained the White House through such anti-democratic methods, these elements are not about to turn back now.

Recent filings by the Republican Party indicate that the Bush campaign outspent the Democrats by nearly five-to-one in the battle over the Florida recount, with much of the \$13.8 million used in the effort coming from the same corporations and executives that are now facing criminal probes. Republican operatives made extensive use of Enron Corp. and Halliburton Co. corporate jets while crisscrossing the state in their drive to block the counting of Florida ballots.

The Democratic Party is incapable of seriously challenging the policies of the Bush administration. Halfhearted at best in its opposition to the theft of the 2000 election, it is presently mired in a dispute over whether the 2002 campaign should make a populist appeal to voters and focus on Bush’s corporate connections.

A *New York Times* column published last week by Al Gore urging the Democrats to reprise his 2000

campaign slogan of defending the “people against the powerful” drew as much fire from Democratic leaders—led by his vice-presidential running mate, Senator Joseph Lieberman—as from the Republicans. Committed to the defense of the same ruling elite as the Republicans, the party leadership is fearful of being charged with inspiring “class warfare.”

Protesting that he was not “anti-business,” Gore argued that the policies of the Bush administration had “put at risk nothing less than the future of democratic capitalism.”



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