

Pragmatism Is Not a Third Party Principle

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*
November 10, 2004

Apart from an outright victory of Libertarian presidential candidate Michael Badnarik, or at least a victory by Constitution Party presidential candidate Michael Peroutka, I can think of no better outcome than the Republican electoral trounce resulting in the reelection of George W. Bush (by three and a half million votes over John Kerry), and the startling capture of significantly more seats in the Senate and the House. Why? Not because I believe that Bush is good for America, but rather because I believe that Bush will now show his true colors. Perhaps Christians and true conservatives will now see that the lesser of two evils is still evil. With such a large majority in Congress, how can Bush excuse himself for not appointing pro-life candidates, stopping the spread of American socialist policies (as well as abolishing the IRS, curbing public education, and privatizing social security), and undermining the constitutional rights of Americans? Unlike other radio talk show hosts and columnists, I intend to hold Bush's feet to the fire. And I predict that the charlatan will soon be revealed for who he really is.

In the recent election, there were clearly better candidates than the likes of Bush or Kerry. For instance, both Badnarik and Peroutka were principled candidates. Together they garnered over a half million votes nationwide, and they might have garnered over a million votes had not so many on the "radical" right been so scared of having Kerry (via the fear-mongering of Bush supporters). Thus, many Americans who truly love liberty equivocated and sadly voted for Bush anyway.

Unlike Bush, both Badnarik and Peroutka are unquestionably dedicated to upholding the Constitution and protecting our rights as Americans. Personally, I preferred Badnarik because I believe his hands-off vision for American society, consistent free-market view, and Jeffersonian political culture is the better of the two. Yet either of these candidates would have been far better than either Bush or Kerry. On a scale of 1 to 10, I ranked Badnarik as a 10 and Peroutka as a 9, while Bush got a 1 and Kerry a 0. Thus, for me, the gulf between the two sets of candidates was enormous.

Unlike Bush, both Badnarik and Peroutka hate socialism and want to restore Constitutional limits on government power. As I understand these candidates, they wanted to open and ensure free markets, to reduce regulation, to encourage and uphold gun ownership and all of the other amendments in the Bill of Rights, to abolish the IRS, to run a strong military without resorting to a draft, to return us to a sound money system (rather than abominable the Federal Reserve system), to repeal rights-snatching decrees like the Patriot Act, to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and take abortion policy out of the hands of the federal judiciary, to uphold and defend private property rights, to support free-market environmentalism, and to get us out of proactive and wars of offense like the one that the US government is undertaking in Iraq. Both men were uncompromising in their positions and support of liberty.

These men have differences, most of which concern the philosophical origin of human rights, immigration, legislating morality, state lotteries, and a few other issues. I am not minimizing these legitimate differences, but I will say that they are relatively minor compared to the major freedom and constitutional issues that both adhere to—in contradistinction to Bush. Too, the Constitution Party's unified platform opposing abortion is also remarkable, as is the stated position of the Libertarians for Life (see www.L4L.org)—especially when one considers Bush's equivocating and lame stance that abortion should be permitted in certain circumstances. Sure, the differences between Libertarians and Constitutionists are significant enough to keep the parties separate. Nevertheless, the views of party members about the other party are telling of just how close the parties really are. I have spoken to many folks from both parties and clearly the Libertarians would rather be ruled by Constitution Party men rather than by Democrats or Republicans, not to mention Ralph Nader or some Green Party clown. Likewise, Constitutionists would prefer to be ruled by Libertarians rather than Democrats, Republicans, Naderites, or Greenies.

I have long argued that the Libertarian Party can provide a tactical advantage for the radical right over other third parties because it is so diverse. My position is not pragmatic. Strategy is not pragmatism. When a Libertarian candidate appears such as Michael Badnarik, who is personally pro-life and in favor of the property rights and freedom values that Christians cherish, then Christians should be impressed.

What's more, Christians could make a principled vote for a man like Badnarik—regardless of what other Libertarians might stand for—without compromising their values. Unlike voting for charlatans like Bush, a principled Christian can vote for a man like Badnarik or Peroutka with a clean conscience.

However, voting for Libertarians brings an added bonus. Thousands of other folks who do not share Christian values or Badnarik's personal values—possibly even homosexuals and druggies—will vote for a Badnarik just because he *wears the Libertarian badge*. (The same thing cannot be said for Peroutka because the Constitution Party's platform is much more insistent and exclusive. Peroutka could not possibly expect to enjoy this tactical advantage.) Thus, when the Libertarians run a right-wing candidate like Badnarik, they have a tactical advantage. Many who chose to vote for Badnarik had the added advantage of having others, with whom they would otherwise have little in common, support their candidate. There is nothing pragmatic about that strategy. It is a principled vote, and it is prudent, regardless of the values of other Badnarik supporters. Of course, Libertarians are not alone in this sort of advantage. I am sure that Bush-supporting Christians were not unhappy about garnering the so-called "log cabin" Republican vote either, even though they despised the lifestyle of such individuals.

Certainly, this strategic advantage does not mean that I would vote Libertarian no matter what. Hypothetically, if Peroutka were running against a pro-abortion, anti-Christian Libertarian, I would make the principled vote for Peroutka, in spite of the fact that I would lose the strategic benefit of garnering the non like-minded vote to my position. For similar reasons, I could not vote for a charlatan like Bush. My vote was too principled (rather than pragmatic), and I simply could not vote for an evildoer. Let's not be confused: while voting for moderate Republicans like Bush to avoid getting bad Democrats is pragmatic, voting for a third party candidate like Badnarik is strategic and principled. And right-wing third party supporters should be unabashedly confident about their vote. The tragedies that are about to befall America under Bush are not our fault.

Just how is voting for Bush unprincipled and tragic? Bush favors raising taxes, expanding the scope of government, involving America in foreign wars in which we have no business being engaged, expanding socialist programs like Medicare, taking away our rights via the Patriot Act, and giving little more than lip service to Christian principles. Bush has appointed almost three dozen militant homosexuals to posts in his administration. (Bill Clinton should be proud of Bush.) Bush has spent many billions more on public education than Clinton did. Bush is a globalist who likes American involvement in the United Nations too. Indeed, George Bush is nothing like Ronald Reagan. Consider too the unprincipled men of Bush's administration, including globalist/socialist Colin Powell who recently showed his heartfelt sentiment of hoping to subject the Taiwanese to socialist mainland China's control. Apparently, Powell doesn't think Mao's tyranny was worth getting all stirred up about. What about counting on "good" Republicans like Bush to make righteous Supreme Court appointments? Don't hold your breath. Many past Republican appointees to the Supreme Court are hardly examples of true conservatism, witness judges Souter, Kennedy, and the treasonous O'Connor. With such large majorities in both houses of Congress, Bush will have no excuse. Indeed, the real Bush can no longer hide behind his rhetoric and deceit.

Here's something else for Christians to consider. Bush is either in favor of sodomite civil unions or he is a liar. Conversely, neither Badnarik nor Peroutka showed any willingness to favor sodomite unions because the federal government, per the Constitution, should not have anything to do with condoning or regulating marriages or giving benefits or recognition to civil unions. If Bush is really in favor of sodomite civil unions, how could principled Christians vote for him? Or, if he was lying when he made that remark, trying to muster up some last minute support, how could principled Christians have voted for a known liar? How could they vote to support a man like Bush who only gives lip-service to important Christian issues, and who clearly supports socialist-leaning policies in America and the rest of the world? The answer is that Christians must not have voted for George Bush out of principle. They voted for him to be pragmatic; merely to vote against Kerry. And now we await the consequences of that pragmatism.

I expect the worst from Bush, and stand ready to respond to his tyrannies on the American people and the rest of the world. Certainly, I hope I am mistaken in my judgment of Bush. However, if my premonition turns out to be right, I trust that the Christian right will finally ditch the Republican party, along with its fear-mongering and pragmatism, and join with one of the two principled third parties instead.