

Will GOP virtual reality fool American voters?

by Harley Schlanger

Evaluating the crushing defeat of Democratic candidates in the November 1994 Congressional elections in January 1995, Sen. Edward Kennedy made his now-famous comment that the United States does not need two Republican Parties. After viewing the Republican convention in San Diego over Aug. 12-16, one might conclude that there are now two Republican Parties, both of which reside within the Republican Party!

There is the GOP of Newt Gingrich, Phil Gramm, and Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, of the "Conservative Revolution." This is the party of the "Contract with America," which insists on murderous austerity to "balance the budget," as in Ridge's "reform" which, in denying medical care to more than 220,000 people, will lead to at least 3,500 deaths within six months. It is the GOP bent on destroying the federal government and the social safety net, while generously offering huge tax breaks for its wealthy sponsors, many of whom shelled out substantial sums to underwrite its convention. This is the Republican Party which Americans came to know *after* the November 1994 elections, the party which interpreted the vote as a mandate to impose its fascist program. In attempting to do so, the Gingrich crowd experienced a steep decline in the polls.

With preconvention polls showing Bob Dole facing a decisive defeat by President Clinton in November, which could lead to the recapture of both Houses of Congress by the Democrats, voters were introduced to a new, kinder, gentler, more "inclusive" GOP on television screens, one which promised it would restore the "American dream" for all.

There should have been a consumer warning label attached to this "big tent" in San Diego, that this new image is brought to you by the same snake oil salesmen who made Rush Limbaugh a success story. In both cases, the content of the product is the same, that is, nothing but hot air. The promoters of the discredited Contract with America are hop-

ing that gullible Americans will again fall for a media public relations blitz.

The GOP and the 'New Confederacy'

As a LaRouche Democrat living in the South since 1974, I have closely watched the Republican Party's rise from obscurity to the majority-party status it enjoys in most southern states today. While some of the impetus for this resurrection was the "conservative" crusade of GOP Presidential nominee Barry Goldwater in 1964, it was the "Southern Strategy" adopted by the 1968 Nixon campaign which proved successful for the GOP.

What the Republicans have done is to definitively dump the historic commitment of Abraham Lincoln (who was one of the party's founders) and William McKinley, to a strong, national federal government responsible for internal improvements, protectionism, and a dirigistic (state-directed) credit policy, in favor of the policies of the Confederacy. Party strategists adopted the states' rights theme of the post-Civil War Dixiecrats, mixed it with the libertarianism of the feudal South ("git big guv'mint off mah back"), and added a dash of thinly disguised racism (the fraudulent stereotype of the fat, lazy, black welfare recipient with a Cadillac) to build its base in the South. As the strategy succeeded in every Presidential election except 1976 and 1992, when the Democratic nominees were southerners, it is not surprising that "boll weevil" Democrats, such as Gramm and Richard Shelby (Alabama), switched to the GOP. At present, the leadership in the Congress is in the hands of this crowd, with Gingrich (Georgia) and Dick Armey (Texas) in the House, and Trent Lott (Mississippi) in the Senate.

To win the Republican nomination in 1996, Dole, who had never been comfortable with this pro-Confederate, anti-government crowd, adapted himself to it. Though he often

had a pained look on his face when he appeared with Gingrich in press conferences to push planks of the Contract with America, he continued to back it. In many primaries on the way to the nomination, Dole won delegates who were in many cases more fervent, hard-core supporters of Gingrich and the Contract than he was. As a result, he found himself trailing President Clinton by more than 25% in some polls going into the convention.

The Kemp ‘option play’

The selection of Jack Kemp as his vice presidential candidate, over Ridge, who had emerged as a front-runner, or another of the austerity-crazed governors, was a sign of Dole’s recognition that Americans have rejected the mean-spirited, destructive tenets of the Conservative Revolution. Playing a major role in transforming the electorate was the sustained, hard-hitting campaign of Lyndon LaRouche for the Democratic nomination for President. LaRouche identified the philosophy behind Gingrich, Ridge, et al., as the same as that of the Nazis.

In four nationally broadcast half-hour television programs, a high-profile tour of key primary states, and the distribution of millions of campaign pamphlets, LaRouche explained to voters why it is accurate to describe what Gingrich and Ridge are pushing as “fascist.” Despite running against a popular incumbent and being blacked out by the media, LaRouche won nearly 600,000 votes in the primaries, showing both the growing strength of his movement in the Democratic Party and the depth of opposition to Gingrich. High-level Republicans confirmed that it was the launching of a campaign by LaRouche to impeach Ridge under the statutes of the Nuremberg Code used to prosecute Nazi war criminals after World War II, that was the nail-in-the-coffin for the Ridge candidacy. More than 5,000 pamphlets calling for Ridge’s impeachment were distributed at the convention.

Having achieved his life-long goal of winning his party’s nomination for President, Dole was not about to crash-and-burn out of loyalty to Gingrich and his increasingly unpopular Contract.

The convention in San Diego was therefore scripted to present Dole and the GOP in a new light. Prior to its opening, Dole endorsed a 15% across-the-board tax cut and a 50% reduction of the capital gains tax, becoming a convert to “supply-side” economics, with its absurd theory that tax breaks will lead to increased investments in the economy. Kemp, one of the original promoters of this approach, thus became the natural alternative to the austerity mantras of the Gingrichites.

The opening night of the convention in San Diego was designed to evoke nostalgia for the optimism of Ronald Reagan and his theme of “Morning in America.” With images of the “Gipper” on the big screen, and his loving wife Nancy at the podium, delegates were blissfully unaware that it was the supply-side tax cuts of the 1980s and the financial deregulation pushed through with it which led to the flood of funds into a speculative bubble which created both the federal defi-

cit, and the debt crisis, which threaten the global economy today.

Viewers were bombarded with a series of “messages” designed to motivate them to reconsider their view of the GOP. Though these messages were nothing but myths—for example, that the 1980s was a decade of economic growth and prosperity, that Communism collapsed due to Republican foreign policy, that the Republican Party is a party of “inclusion” (a survey showed that, in reality, 88% of the delegates to the convention were white, and 16% were millionaires, hardly a cross-section of the U.S. population)—the initial evidence is that the message was not getting across. The tightly controlled convention, in which every speech had to be approved to eliminate any possibility of contention, was just plain boring.

ABC News anchor Ted Koppel of “Nightline” left the convention two days early, saying, “This convention is more of an infomercial than a news event.” Tom Johnson, the president of Cable News Network, declared it to be the “most controlled convention” he had ever seen. “The party has been able to control the message; they have been able to control their audience; they have been able to control the media,” he said. Apparently, viewers across the country agree, as the overnight ratings of network television coverage were down 20% compared with the 1992 convention. NBC even preempted, for its western affiliates, the traditional highlight of the convention, the delegate roll call, in favor of sitcom reruns.

Same mean-spirited GOP

Though Gingrich and his fellow mean-spirited, austerity-preaching allies among freshman congressmen and governors were relegated to non-prime-time roles for the sake of appearance, they were the leaders behind the scenes. Gingrich was everywhere, exhorting the faithful. The message coming from Gingrich and his allies was, “Don’t worry about the convention, the Contract is in the Platform.” His appearance with country singer Travis Tritt at a fundraiser typified his convention mania. With a grinning Newt at his side, Tritt sang his hit song, which could be the anthem of the Conservative Revolution: “Here’s a Quarter, Call Someone Who Cares.”

And, in the backrooms, it was the old GOP establishment, which was calling the shots. In a forum sponsored by the International Republican Institute, a Dole foreign policy was spelled out by a group of Kissinger protégés, led by Kissinger himself. Joining him were George Shultz, Al Haig, (Sir) Brent Scowcroft, and Lawrence Eagleburger, all pushing the line that Clinton’s (anti-British) foreign policy is incompetent and dangerous. Instead, we must go back to the London-controlled policies of balance of power and geopolitics of especially the Bush years.

Underlying it all was the most serious shortcoming of the convention, that there was not one word devoted to solving the gravest global and national economic and social crisis since the last depression. In the end, the Republican Party has succumbed to virtual reality.