

Virginians buy fascism for a 'mess of pottage'

by Nancy Spannaus

In the last two weeks of the gubernatorial campaign in Virginia, Democratic candidate and current Lieutenant-Governor Donald Beyer lit into the "no car tax" campaign of his opponent, Jim Gilmore, and accused voters who fell for this single-issue goody, of following the Biblical Esau in selling their birthright for a "mess of pottage." Beyer was right—although he and his campaign neither explained how, nor themselves addressed what had to be done to reverse the economic decline for the majority of Virginians. But it was too little, too late.

On election day, a majority of Virginians literally boycotted the polls. It was the lowest voter turnout in at least 30 years, and reflected precisely the same distrust of current pollster-driven politics that was expressed in the 1996 Presidential elections, in which less than 50% of the registered voters went to the polls. In Virginia's Tidewater area, for example, the turnout this year is reported to have been 43%—and as low as 32-24% in some predominantly African-American precincts.

Under these circumstances, the overwhelming majority of Virginians who went to vote, were dupes of Gilmore's "no car tax" come-on, or members of the George Bush-Pat Robertson fascist machine in the Commonwealth. The anti-American Republicans swept the top three positions in state government, for the first time in this century. They now control the Virginia Senate, by holding the tie-breaking lieutenant governor's seat. And they are within a couple seats (including one where a recount is going on), of taking control of the House of Delegates.

As I reported in the Oct. 31 *EIR* (see p. 72), and put out in a leaflet widely circulated within the week before the election,

this outcome is not just a matter of concern to Virginians, but to the United States as a whole. The Gilmore ticket, organized as it is around the implementation of a *fascist* economic and social policy, does not actually have a mandate; but, unless it is stopped by a citizenry aroused from its lethargy, and shocked out of its rageful insistence on "me-first," this Bush-Robertson-North machine will consolidate a fascist stronghold, with open animosity to the government of the United States, right next to the seat of that government.

Absence of truth

As Lyndon LaRouche has been pointing out, the most dangerous element of the current political situation in the United States is the increasing abstention of Americans from political participation. These disaffected citizens are enraged, or discouraged, about the fact that neither political party addresses the worsening realities of their lives, and are so obviously driven by concern for popularity and funds. It is these disaffected citizens who become cannon fodder for groups such as the militia movement, or other kinds of gangs that can be directed against the government of the United States.

There is no excuse for such abstention among U.S. citizens; the reality is, that their abstention is often responsible for the evils to which they object.

But, that having been said, there's no avoiding the fact that the major candidates contributed to the cynicism, by literally lying about the political and economic situation.

The worst example was the economy. Gilmore and Beyer both claimed—and top Democrats are doing so to this day—that the Gov. George Allen administration had brought prosperity to Virginia, and people were generally doing well. Gil-

more used this lie to justify his assertion that there would be plenty of money to cut taxes, without cutting services. Beyer bought into this party line, apparently in order to avoid contradicting the common consensus, and being forced to offer an apparently expensive, and desperately needed, program of infrastructure construction.

But, most Virginians, as well as other Americans, know that they are living worse off than before, both in terms of the amounts of time, or number of jobs, they have to work; how much debt they have to go into, to survive; and what the state of the infrastructure around them is. Ignoring that reality is perilous, as the Democrats have now found out. On the other side, the fact that Virginians would buy into a fascist program of prison slave-labor, and welfare cuts, on the basis of a promise of the quick tax cut that will quite possibly never occur, shows a significant lack of sense, as well as morality.

The second major area where the Virginia Democrats and Republicans de facto agreed to cover up the truth, was on the question of corrections policy. Both Gilmore and Beyer “took credit” for the no-parole policy, as if this were a policy which had anything to do with justice. They both ignored the gross violations of basic rights in the Virginia system—all the way from the incarceration of the LaRouche political prisoners, to the medical murder of prisoners for cost-cutting reasons, to executions of individuals with claims to innocence, to the policy of replacing free labor with cheap prison slave labor.

Obviously, political pollsters nowadays will insist that advocacy for prisoners is a “loser.” But within large sections of the black and labor communities, it is well-known that the so-called wheels of justice are grinding people to death, and promise to do worse in the future. If a political leader had the guts to tell the truth, and confront the shallow prejudices of the electorate, while championing the economic and political rights of all, people would be shocked—and could be changed.

The Gilmore pitch

It should be emphasized that the Republican, Gilmore pitch to the voters had absolutely nothing to do with the Republican tradition of Abraham Lincoln. Gilmore’s campaign was a tool of the national and statewide Republican machines. He received at least \$2 million of his total \$10 million campaign chest from the national Republican campaign committees, and hefty support from national, as well as local, Republican celebrities. He was given a limited pitch to convey to the electorate: “no car tax” and “4,000 more teachers.” And, he avoided all occasions where he might be distracted into other matters.

Most indicative of the level of Gilmore’s appeal to the voters was one of his last television ads. It featured a series of Virginia couples, chosen to look like the average working family. One after another, they said their piece: “I hate that car tax!” This is politics? Sure, it’s the politics of reaction and hate.

On top of that, the Republicans bragged of their resistance to the Federal government, and their policy of filling up the prisons. And, while pledging to support education, Gilmore left no doubt that *reducing taxes*, i.e., services, came first.

The Democratic failure

Given the fact that the Democratic Party had a decent, thinking human being as a candidate, the campaign it waged was a tragedy. Beyer had chosen “education” as his campaign theme, and had chaired a commission on the physical breakdown of schools, which concluded that over \$8 billion in investment was required to keep the roofs from leaking, so to speak. Beyer had also participated in a commission on transportation, which developed plans for rails as well as highways. The Northern Virginia auto dealer felt compelled to emphasize that he was a businessman, not a lawyer, but he clearly was thinking about “rebuilding” Virginia for all.

But, from the start, he was advised not to present any economic perspective by which such rebuilding could occur. In addition to his pollsters and advisers, the *Washington Post* knocked him for a loop, accusing him of advocating a tax increase when he discussed investments in the state. Immediately, Beyer committed himself to a “no-tax” pledge.

This tied his hands. He should have been talking about taxing speculation, investing in schools and rails and power plants, increasing wages in this pitifully low-wage state, and rebuilding water infrastructure. Instead, he talked about limited tax cuts, including his own version of reducing the car tax, and cheaper improvements, like raising teachers’ salaries.

As the campaign went on, his “brain trust” advised him to concentrate more and more on the suburban vote, even the upper-class white women’s vote! This led to a concentration on both the environmentalist issues, and, more disastrously, the issue of abortion rights. Beyer does not support the feminist, “gay-rights” agenda, but he found himself surrounded by those trappings, even when he was quite appropriately attacking Pat Robertson for his attempts to destroy public education.

Meanwhile, the traditional Democratic Party constituencies found themselves without effective ammunition against the Gilmore crew, and saw their ranks eroded by support for the one economic issue on the agenda, the elimination of the car tax. Many ultimately chose to vote their pocketbook—because the Democratic Party had never informed them of the fascist nature of Gilmore’s program, and because the Democratic ticket never offered a sound alternative.

In the wake of the disaster, some Democratic Party leaders are being quoted as saying that they will go along with Gilmore’s anti-tax program, to “regain popularity.” This is equally disastrous, coming as it does within the context of the global financial explosion that entered a new phase in October, and of Gilmore’s program for vastly expanding prison labor and service cuts. The solution lies in the decision to *tell the truth*, on the economy and the justice system.