

Elegy for a Misspent Campaign

by Jeremy M. Barker

For those who pay attention to such things, the polls have painted a despairing picture of John Kerry's chances of defeating George W. Bush on November 2. Of a trio of opinion polls released mid-September, Kerry was at best in a dead heat with Bush, at worst trailing him by seven or more points. All of which has left many wondering, "Where exactly did it all go wrong?"

Conventional wisdom amongst the enraged, Bush-hating left is that it's all to do with the Republican Party's lie machine, particularly the nefarious accusations of the Swift-Boat Veterans for Truth. But just below the surface of the uncomfortable coalition of liberals, from the pierced and political to the champagne socialists, who've all agreed to back Kerry as the anti-Bush, is the sinking suspicion that if we lose, it's really Kerry's fault.

At *the Stranger*, Sandeep Kaushik did some of the best convention coverage I found regarding the DNC. This is because Kaushik eschewed the power politics of big name leaders and think tanks, and spent his time largely in the company of some of Washington state's leftist delegates, including former Dean supporters and current Dennis Kucinich supporters. What struck me was how much these delegates felt beholden to their principles, rather than an interest in providing the Democrats a winning platform.

The democratic process is about compromise, pressure and all the nitty-gritty, behind-closed-doors decision making that leftists, enraptured by their own moral rectitude, find so anathema to their beliefs. Consider Sylvia Olveda, a Dean delegate from Washington. As Kaushik reports, "She

believes in Dean because 'he was the only one who stood up' when people like her needed a politician to stand up for them." She felt pressured to vote for Kerry, although, "In my conscience [Dean] was who I wanted to vote for."

But what would be the point? Dean enjoyed a great deal of popularity early in the primaries, and by sending delegates like Olveda to the convention to vote for him, Dean was able to gather some clout which should have been able to influence Kerry's

position on the war.

And it did. In fact, Dean's clout had already been established in the Kerry camp; what was needed at the convention was a show of strength and unity, not pointless moral grandstanding.

That's the real problem. Liberals have for too long refused to engage in the painstaking process of policy, which necessitates compromise, not unbending principle. The result has been the failure over the last 24 years of liberalism in America. I'm sure that people like Olveda have a lovely vista from their high horses; I just hope they're sufficiently troubled by the view. ♦



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