

# NORTH COAST

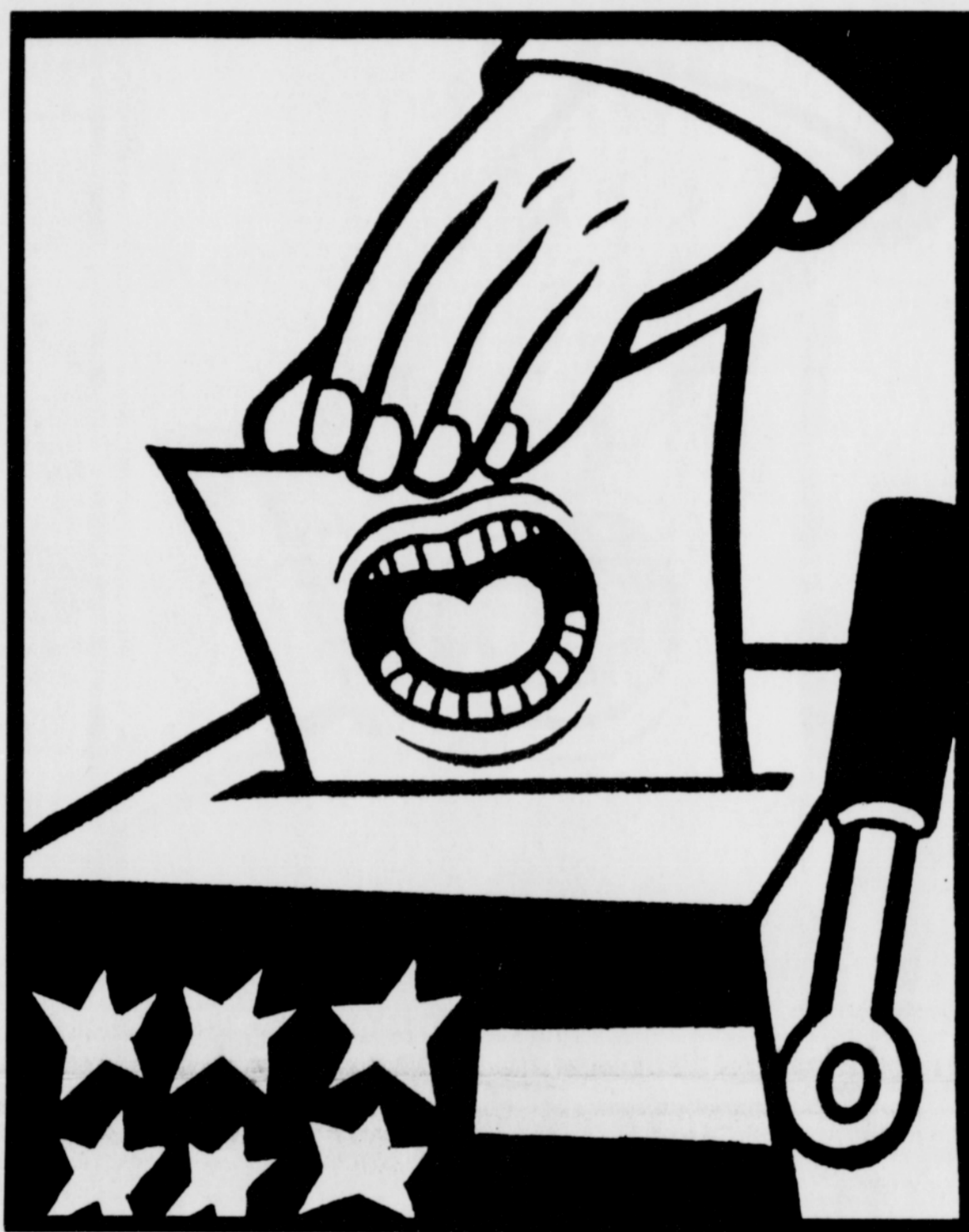


# TIMES EAGLE

SEPTEMBER 2004

*'In a dark time the eye begins to see'*  
~THEODORE ROETHKE

50CENTS VOL26NO2



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## VOTE FOR LIFE & LIBERTY

*'Vote for George Bush & you'll never have to vote again.'*  
~Possible campaign slogan for both parties

Once again the United States of America is in need of a revolution to thwart incipient tyranny and the blatant attempt by a few robber barons, whom the framers of the Constitution warned us against, from seizing control of the remnants of government that operate on the behalf of the people.

This necessary revolution is underwritten in the nation's principles and is as sweeping in its implications as the original revolt against English rule, which was as corrupt, despotic and hubristic as the current American government under President George W. Bush and his cabal of pompous theocrats.

This revolution is within the law, it is supported by the law — in design if seldom in practice; and the law not only provides its mechanics, the law in a very real sense depends on it to maintain its legitimacy.

This revolution is more binding than the ancient right to remove emperors in old China or revolt against kings and Church in medieval Europe.

This revolution is the vote, guaranteed after much struggle and Constitutional amendments to all citizens, which too many abuse by disuse.

On average, less than 50% of eligible voters in this country vote. Disgust and powerlessness — not apathy — alienate millions of citizens from the polls, and are a major source of great public discontent that affects even those who do vote who are discouraged and fed up.

That discontent might be tapped by concentrating on registering to vote the many millions who have either dropped out of the political process or have never been given much opportunity or incentive to participate in it.

If these millions of ordinary people were to rise from their bitter cynicism and phlegmatic despair and use nothing more than their Constitutional right to vote, they will discover they have the power to transform much of what has gone off track in our recent history.

It is time to recognize that the heart of our liberty is disappearing in the despair of the deprived and disenfranchised.

Nonvoters are generally economically impaired and suffer most from inequities and corruption with little chance of prosperity in the existing status quo. Yet the potential of real power lies within these disaffected masses.

There are more grassroots organizations than at any time in the nation's history, all waiting for a real chance to voice their concerns, issues and visions.

All politics is local: while the trend seems to favor high-pressure political professionals backed by large amounts of money who increasingly fragment the electorate with nasty advertising and PAC-backed candidates, they are vulnerable to the populism of grassroots organizing and campaigning that must be organized at the community level in every community in the USA.

We have allowed the vote to be trivialized and made much less than its true potency. Money has been substituted — the cash candidates accept supersedes the vote (and insures their continuance in power), which is treated as a commodity to be purchased. Securely established incumbents count on fewer people to vote to maintain power and on ever larger contributions from wealthy and corporate sponsors who use their money to turn campaigns into public ordeals of fear and loathing.

Paradoxically, as almost direct cause and effect, fewer Americans voting cheapens the vote as well as makes it cheaper to purchase.

Not voting is a virtual assurance those who do not vote will remain powerless as they become increasingly victimized.

The next most necessary thing we must do is ensure that our votes count, which means demanding paper verification of our votes. The best way to do that is replace suspiciously tamper-prone high-tech voting machines with paper ballots — which is the method most world democracies continue to use because it is the most reliable.

Paper ballots are counted by people, not by machines. There are no patent liabilities involved in the process of handcounting votes, and the checks and balances — and rechecks — to ensure the accuracy and honesty of counting ballots are required by law.

And ultimately, as with juries, the people who count ballots regard their task with grave responsibility — a weighty, passionate and essential sense of the obligation of citizenship that machines do not feel. People can of course be manipulated and corrupted, but never so easily as machines, especially machines designed and marketed by the very political/corporate/military fraternity that has the most to gain from rigging elections.

Oregon, with its paper mail-in ballot protects voters from the threat of computer voting corruption — but for voters in the 30+ states with these machines, there are several suggestions about what they can do to reduce the possibility of fraud. One piece of advice is that they vote absentee. Another is that volunteer groups take up poll watching, and also that election returns be posted at the precinct level. Retain ballots in the machines in which they are counted for documentation. Results publicly displayed in precincts because the "audit trail" gets lost once they are transmitted to centralized counting sites.

The concern felt throughout the nation about the integrity of the November 2 election is exemplified by national and international observers who intend to monitor the election.

We do not have a political system that presents us with the best choices our country can offer. If it did we would have never got George W. Bush as President; he and his confederates would never have got close enough to steal the last election. The insular filtration process of two political parties screens out nearly everybody qualified for public office and is so ripe for Constitutional infidelity that it extensively awards a gluttonous minority over the interests of everybody else.

The nation's political and economic structure needs massive and real change to transfer power and wealth back to the majority of ordinary citizens who are the true leaders of democracy. This election, perhaps among the most important in the nation's history, can be a start in that direction.

~MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER