

Republicans, Justice Dept. Gear Up to Steal Votes

by Edward Spannaus

In the wake of an unprecedented voter-registration drive conducted by civil rights organizations, local Democratic Party activists and others—on a scale not seen since the 1960s—Republican Party officials, in league with John Ashcroft's Justice Department, are stepping up their counter-campaign to intimidate potential voters and to suppress the vote among minorities on Nov. 2.

In an election already tainted by the widespread use of fraud-prone computerized voting, Republican dirty tricks combined with Justice Department organized intimidation, indicate that the chaos on Nov. 2 could dwarf what occurred in Florida in the 2000 elections.

A few examples of the fraud and dirty tricks that have emerged in recent weeks include:

- A private voter-registration company, Sproul & Associates, working on contract with the Republican National Committee, is under investigation in at least two states — Oregon and Nevada — for having directed its employees to destroy Democratic voter registrations. The head of the company is a former head of the Republican Party and the Christian Coalition in Arizona.

- Seven Republican operatives tried unsuccessfully to relocate 63 polling places in Philadelphia at the last minute; all are in Democratic areas, and most are heavily non-white.

- Ignoring warnings from election officials, Florida Governor Jeb Bush last May submitted to local election officials a flawed listing of alleged felons for purposes of purging voter rolls, including names of 2500 felons who had had their voting rights restored; most were Democrats, and many were black. No Hispanics, who often vote Republi-

can in Florida, were on the purge list. The list was junked in July, but concerns over purged voting lists remain.

Provisional Voting

As we have previously reported, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, under the direction of Attorney General John Ashcroft, has virtually ceased enforcing voting rights and protecting access to the ballot box; instead it has launched criminal investigations into voter registration in a number of states. It plans on deploying hundreds, if not thousands, of voting "monitors" and Federal prosecutors on Election Day.

Therefore, it was no surprise when the Justice Department intervened on Oct. 18 into a voting rights lawsuit being heard in Michigan, in which civil rights and voting rights groups are suing the Republican Secretary of State, who has ordered local election officials not to accept provisional ballots from voters who mistakenly appear in the wrong precinct. Ashcroft's Justice Department filed a friend-of-the-court brief siding with the Republicans who are trying to suppress the vote—especially among minorities and poor people—on Election Day.

What may have prompted the Justice Department's Michigan intervention, was the action by a Federal judge in Toledo, Ohio, on Oct. 14, who issued an injunction against Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell in a similar case. Blackwell, a Republican, has been under fire from Ohio trade unions and Democratic officials for taking various measures to impede new voters, in a manner evoking comparisons with Katherine Harris, the notorious Florida Secretary of State during the 2000 elections. Two weeks earlier, two Ohio State Sena-

tors had called for Blackwell's resignation, accusing him of setting up barriers against eligible voters.

Blackwell had issued an order to county officials that they should only accept provisional ballots if people vote in their correct polling place. However, Federal Judge James Carr ruled that Blackwell's order violates the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Judge Carr said that the provisional-ballot provision of HAVA is intended to protect the right to vote, by allowing a voter to cast a provisional ballot so long as he is within the correct jurisdiction (that is, the county), even if the voter's name does not appear on that precinct's voting rolls.

The provisional ballot provision was included in HAVA, in response to the purge of minority voters from the voter rolls in Florida before the 2000 elections. Then, if a voter was illegally purged from the rolls, he had no remedy; now, he can cast a "provisional" ballot, which can later be verified and then counted.

A Case Western Reserve University professor had calculated that Blackwell's order could affect *tens of thousands* of eligible voters, and that it would have its biggest impact on voters who have moved; these are likely to be poor people, who may have difficulty in getting transportation to travel to another polling place.

Within hours of the ruling, Blackwell filed an appeal with the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati.

In the Michigan case, the DOJ put forward arguments directly contrary to the findings of Judge Carr in Toledo. In true neo-Confederate, states' rights fashion, the DOJ argues that HAVA cannot interfere in the states' voting rules, and also that individuals have no right to sue under HAVA; they should just leave it to the Justice Department to enforce their voting rights!

However, the Federal court in Michigan thoroughly rejected Ashcroft's arguments on Oct. 19, and issued an injunction restraining the Secretary of State from enforcing her order on provisional ballots.

DOJ 'Woefully Unprepared'

A reflection of how Ashcroft has abandoned any enforcement of voter rights, came when Reps. John Conyers (the senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee) and Henry Waxman (the senior Democrat on the House Government Reform Committee), released a report which they had requested from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), as to the ability of the Department of Justice to respond to complaints of voting irregularities.

The GAO found that the Voting Section of the DOJ's Civil Rights Division does not have a reliable method to track and document telephone complaints of voting irregularities, and that it does not routinely track its election-monitoring activities through its computerized case management system.

Furthermore, the GAO complained about lack of cooperation from the DOJ while it was conducting its audit of its

voting-rights activities.

"In what appears to be another razor-thin election, the Justice Department appears woefully unprepared, and once again has left us vulnerable to another crisis in democracy," said Representative Conyers in a statement. "The fundamentals of election protection are not being met."

"It is inexcusable that the Justice Department is not fully prepared to protect the right of all Americans to vote," said Representative Waxman. "The Justice Department does not have the systems in place that are necessary to respond to reports of voters being turned away from the polls on Election Day."

Kerry Won't Repeat Gore's Errors

Both parties are already preparing tens of thousands of lawyers to monitor the Nov. 2 elections, and to file lawsuits contesting the outcome. The Kerry campaign has reportedly mobilized at least 10,000 lawyers for Election Day, and is already filing pre-emptive actions in many states against Republican dirty tricks and vote-suppression operations, and also for the purpose of establishing a firm grounding for any needed post-election legal challenges.

The Kerry campaign is determined not to repeat the mistakes of 2000, when the Gore-Lieberman campaign basically threw the election away. As the Associated Press reported in Oct. 21, John Kerry will not hesitate to declare victory on Election night, and to defend it, in contrast to Al Gore's premature concession to George W. Bush on Election night in 2000—a concession which Gore then tried to withdraw, when he realized that Florida was still in doubt. Kerry has "a simple strategy for Nov. 3 and beyond: Do not repeat Al Gore's mistakes."

In addition to the thousands of lawyers and observers already lined up, the Kerry strategy reportedly also involves six "SWAT teams" of lawyers and political operatives who will be stationed strategically around the country, awaiting orders to speed to a battleground state if needed. Every battleground state will have a SWAT team within one hour's reach, and office space and equipment for a recount is lined up in every battleground state.

Kerry will also name a transition team shortly after the election, and will be prepared to name a national security team even if the election is still being contested. In 2000, while Bush was leaking word about national security team appointments and holding public transition meetings, Gore was sitting on his hands waiting for the outcome of Florida to be decided. Kerry's team will not repeat that sort of mistake.

But the best insurance against being forced into multiple Florida-type contests this year, is to do what former Democratic candidate Lyndon LaRouche has insisted: Mobilize and organize for a landslide for John Kerry on Nov. 2, to block the plans by the Bush-Cheney gang to steal the election once again.