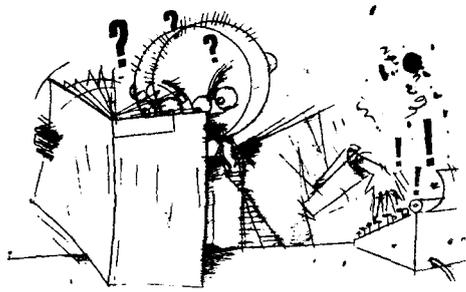


LETTERS



Slanted

MAGGIE GARB'S ARTICLE CONCERNING ABORTION and post-abortion syndrome (*ITT*, Feb. 22) presents opinions cleverly disguised as fact and put them in a newspaper-like journal so that others would be inclined to believe them as fact. This kind of reporting is slanted so far to the liberal side that I wonder if there is anyone who wouldn't notice. Whatever happened to doing research on both sides of the argument? Or, if she is really writing true journalism, why does she just skim over the research that suggests that some women really do experience post-abortion syndrome? Garb seems to think that there is no one who would fall into that category. My sister experienced this and still remorsees over her abortions. This may not be a syndrome of itself, but I'd be willing to bet a lot of other women go through the same emotions.

Nobody that agrees with abortion seems to want to acknowledge that there are problems with it. But let's wise up. We all know there are problems with abortion, just as there are complications in pregnancy. Let's not slant the argument so that those people who want to protect the lives of the unborn are portrayed as underhanded liars who fabricate medical and psychological traumas to buoy their cause. Let's keep editorials on the editorial page and reporting in the news section of the newspapers. I'll bet my letter ends up on the editorial page. But then, I am not pretending to write a researched article.

The type of articles you print generally have been consistent, but since this article I don't believe I understand the philosophy of your publication. You seem to advocate the rights of the poor in Central America, be against violence, condemn acts of terrorism, praise peacemakers and focus on human rights. Yet you switch sides and print a cover story that supports the killing of unborn children. Please tell me how you can integrate these two into a cohesive philosophy.

Jim Anthony
Arvada, Colo.

Rabid

I WAS VERY DISAPPOINTED TO READ THE RABID outburst by Maggie Garb on the abortion issue (*ITT*, Feb. 22). She displays so much of what she condemns in her opponents—frenzied unreasoning and muddy emotionalism.

Having been pro-choice for many years, I was turned around when a cogent, very basic argument was given to me for supporting the pro-life movement (though I am in little sympathy with much of the hysterical hypocrisy of the Right-to-Life organization).

Abortion is a human rights question—not a religious one.

Since *Roe vs. Wade*, women's rights have dropped like flies to support the original premise. Women no longer have the right to a full explanation of medical procedures from their doctors. (In the case of abortion only. No mention need be made of late term risks, nor of possible side effects. Even with minor plastic surgery a woman *must* be told of any risk, no matter how remote—or she may rightly claim malpractice if they occur. Abor-

tionists are exempt from this problem.) Women have no right to know about and guide their daughters' medical procedures. (In the case of abortion only. If a child needs a finger sewn, a tonsil removed, an eye treated, informed consent by a legal guardian *must* be obtained before work is started. For an abortion, which is at least as risky as a tonsillectomy, the consent is not only not necessary, but avoided.)

In congressional hearings not long after *Roe vs. Wade*, the question of when the exact moment human life begins was explored by top physicians and biologists from around the U.S. Everyone who testified, whether pro-life or pro-choice, said the same thing—human life begins at the moment of conception. Given this statement, it is inconceivable that any group that promulgates itself as one that upholds the rights of all against exploiters could possibly support elective abortions.

I would hope that Garb will educate herself on this question from a human rights point of view, and seriously think the consequences through to the end.

Patti Raynis
Sonoita, Ariz.

Rational

THANK YOU FOR MAGGIE GARB'S FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE, "Abortion foes give birth to a 'syndrome'" (*ITT*, Feb. 22). Not only was it exceptionally well researched and well written, it revealed the shaky facts on which the right-to-life movement is based. Quoting "studies" and statistics, they exploit the power of suggestion in the hope that women will come forward as victims of "post-abortion syndrome."

Garb writes with a true sense of the issues, exposing the anti-abortionists' problematic arguments rationally. I am heartened to see *In These Times* covering abortion as a front-page issue. It's a discussion none of us can afford to avoid, and it is crucial in this political climate that we make ourselves heard.

I encourage all those who can to join the April 9 "March for Women's Lives" in Washington, D.C.

Barb Morrison
New York

Citizens Corps

I AM GREATLY SURPRISED BY JOHN B. JUDIS' ENDORSEMENT of the Democratic Leadership Council's proposed Citizens Corps (*ITT*, Feb. 15). The most objectionable thing about the DLC's proposal, as I understand it, is not that it asks citizens to take on social duty—an admirable request—but how it does so and who it asks.

The proposal would have vouchers earned through participation in the Citizens Corps replace other federal education assistance. There are two problems with this plan. First, the persistence of differences in educational opportunity has been and continues to be one of the grossest means of enforcing class-based privilege (surely Judis knows this). Countering those differences with direct governmental payments and low-interest loans should not have to be justified or earned by those who receive such aid.

This aid is truly an "entitlement," in that the recipients are entitled to the aid and should in no way be asked to justify it. Given the Reagan-era assault on college grant and loan programs and on education funding in general, now is not the time to put federal education programs under the heading of "a new social compact based on reciprocal obligation and civic duty." The proposal is especially odious considering the exploitative nature of requiring low-income would-be students to work at sub-minimum wage jobs in order to "qualify" for educational assistance—assistance best thought of as a corrective for the iniquities of our culture and not as "favors and privileges bestowed by government."

The second problem is the truly exploitative nature and intent of this proposal. The DLC plan would be just another impediment to education for low-income people; it would thus serve a function opposite its ostensible one, and make it easier than ever to keep the doors of higher education closed to all but the wealthy.

A Citizens Corps that would encourage and enable a cross section of able citizens to perform public works would be excellent. The DLC's proposal seems to be nothing of the sort. Instead, it would take an already inadequate (though easily justified) aid program and make it needlessly and counterproductively burdensome. I was much taken aback by Judis' support for this plan.

I should also add a word about the military aspect of the plan. The notion of assigning vouchers of greater value for military service than for civilian service is highly questionable, to say the least.

Benjamin Moss
Austin, Texas

Independent politics

RECENT LETTERS AND EDITORIAL COMMENTARY (*ITT*, Nov. 23, Dec. 7, 1988) have raised issues surrounding left participation in the Democratic Party and the role of third-party politics. Third-party candidacies, as *In These Times* pointed out, often can be characterized as token rituals rather than as efforts seriously contending for power.

Nonetheless, *In These Times* has overemphasized participation in the Democratic Party to the virtual exclusion of left third-party politics. Condemning all left third-party politics as sectarian comes uncomfortably close to mainstream trivialization of the left itself. To ignore or brush aside all left third-party campaigns or electoral efforts outside the Democratic Party is also sectarian.

Third-party or independent campaigns may be appropriate at times, particularly on the local level. "Non-partisan" electoral strategies, such as referendum and initiative campaigns, also deserve more attention than they have received either in *In These Times* or elsewhere on the left. At other times, particularly relative to national campaigns, it may make more sense for the left to participate actively within the Democratic Party.

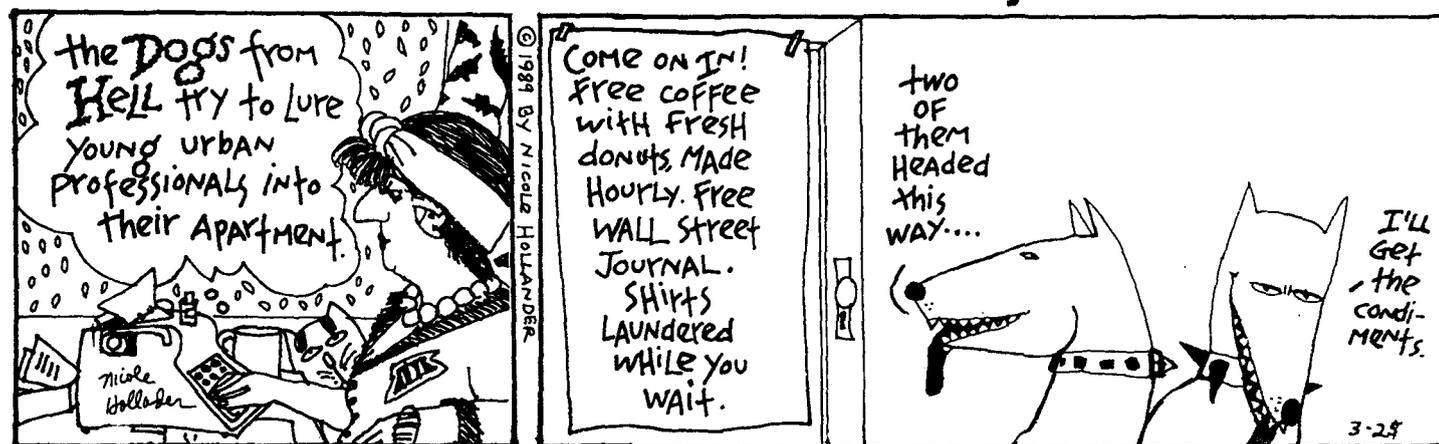
Rigid adherence to one side or the other of this debate needs to be replaced with strategic and tactical flexibility. By way of one specific proposal along these lines, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the Socialist Party U.S.A. (SP) should explore closer working relations, if not reunification. DSA's Democratic Party focus and the SP's third-party approach are complementary in a number of respects. The non-sectarian left would greatly benefit from strengthened ties between what are its two best and most representative groups.

Jay D. Jurie
Orlando, Fla.

Editor's reply: We regret having given the impression that we believe local independent or third-party election campaigns are poor strategy. Obviously, in such places as Burlington, Vt., and Iowa City—and in many other cities where independents can mount effective campaigns—party labels don't matter to the majority of voters, and primary elections are not important forums. In such cases it matters little how candidates are labeled.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

SYLVIA



California's Proposition 103 went against pundit tide

On an otherwise sour election day four months ago, there was a bit of good news from California. Voters there passed Proposition 103, a consumer-rights measure designed to both roll back property/casualty insurance rates and to force insurers to obtain prior state approval for future rate increases (see In These Times, Nov. 2, 1988, and Jan. 18, 1989). The proposition—written by consumer advocate Harvey Rosenfield and endorsed by Ralph Nader—also promotes competition within the insurance industry.

The successful effort to pass Proposition 103 endured tremendous obstacles. Organizers for the proposal had to overcome a \$66 million opposition campaign from the insurance industry, which sponsored three pro-industry propositions that were disguised as consumer-rights measures. The industry pushed these propositions with an unprecedented media campaign that included a seven-month barrage of radio and TV advertising. But that was not all. Advocates of Proposition 103 were also faced with a \$16 million campaign from the trial lawyers—the insurance industry's usual foes—who sponsored their own reform proposal, albeit one that lacked Proposition 103's legal punch.

Both of the opposition efforts outspent any such previous campaign in California. And yet these high-tech and high-profile campaigns were defeated by an operation that spent less than \$400,000, discounting fundraising expenditures. If the proposition survives court challenges California will be transformed from a state with little effective

insurance regulation to one with the toughest and most progressive regulatory structure in the nation. Proposition 103's grassroots victory offers hope—and may serve as a model—for future efforts on the left.

As part of its ongoing series on the prospects of the left within the Democratic Party, In These Times asked Proposition 103 campaign manager Bill Zimmerman, a veteran political operative and media consultant, to explain the victory. While Zimmerman's conclusion will inspire many readers, writer S.M. Miller—whose story appears on the opposite page—offers a sobering look at the state of the left. Miller explores the contradiction between traditional liberalism's focus on "production-oriented" issues such as labor and the left's more recent emphasis on "consumption-oriented" issues like those involved in Proposition 103.

By Bill Zimmerman

HOW DID PROPOSITION 103 WIN? BY breaking the rules. We relied on free media (the press) rather than paid media (advertising) for the wholesale delivery of our message. We built a campaign based on door-to-door work in a state where that tactic has failed so often that it was no longer receiving serious consideration. Unlike anyone before us, we col-

lected the 571,000 signatures we submitted to qualify 103 for the ballot primarily through the mail and door-to-door (so that we could simultaneously ask for small donations) rather than with professional signature-gatherers who operate far more efficiently but must also be paid.

We relied on Ralph Nader to be our fea-

The DEMOCRATS:

Planning a party

tured endorser even though he is often taken to be a polarizing and controversial figure. We had virtually no support from elected officials because fewer than a handful across California had the courage to back us—although, now that 103 has passed, we have to beat many of the rest of them off with a stick. Only one major newspaper in the state gave us its endorsement. We never took a poll or conducted a focus group. We didn't have the money, but we had little trouble reading the numbers in the telling actions of our opponents.

It was an insurgent campaign that made ample use of press stunts and theatrics to capture and cultivate a populist image. Nonetheless, it was a campaign firmly based on a problem of real and perceived importance, and a solution of real and apparent significance. That's why we won.

School for success: The lessons that emerge from, but go beyond, this experience are these:

- The effectiveness of negative advertising is inversely related to the significance of the choice being presented to voters. In an election where voters believe that the choice they are given is relatively meaningless, such as the one between George Bush and Michael Dukakis, they can be manipulated by negative ads. But when the outcome is thought to have a serious effect on their lives, as was the case for gouged and outraged California insurance consumers, voters are fully capable of ignoring negative ads, no matter what their number or how well done.

- Voters are neither too ignorant nor too disinterested to make thoughtful choices about complex issues. California voters supported the one insurance proposition they had to work the hardest to learn about. Paid propaganda about the other four was easily and everywhere available. But to find out about 103, they had to read an apparently dry newspaper article or talk at length to a friend.

In addition to the five insurance propositions, there were 24 others on the California ballot, more than at any time in over 40 years. In San Francisco there were an additional 24 municipal propositions. Yet, contrary to expectations, the falloff in votes between the presidency at the top of the ticket and Proposition 103 near the bottom was minimal.

- The desire for economic democracy is

high enough to transcend both party and ideology. Almost half of the people who signed petitions to place Proposition 103 on the ballot were Republicans. In Orange County, surely the most conservative and Republican metropolitan county in the nation, 103 got 48 percent of the vote (as opposed to 51.2 percent statewide). This happened despite the fact that 103 entails extensive government interference in private industry, as well as price regulation, and was endorsed by Ralph Nader.

When the attention of voters, any voters, is sufficiently focused on matters of self-interest, their presumed ideological conservatism falls away. Why? Because most voters are highly dissatisfied with the current distribution of wealth and power in the U.S.

What else explains the remarkable number of white votes captured in this past election by a black candidate for president who started with higher negatives than any other figure in national politics? The message was lost on the consensus-minded moderate who became the nominee of the Democratic Party, and equally lost on his inept consensus-minded handlers. And that's precisely why so many voters came to think the choice between Bush and Dukakis was unimportant.

- There are times when the most old-fashioned campaign tactics can prevail over the most modern. The California insurers were beaten by a campaign that relied primarily on two of the most old-fashioned forms of political communication, word-of-mouth and the press. In very conservative San Diego County, where the 103 campaign did extensive door-to-door work, it got 44 percent of the vote. In very liberal Sacramento County, where it did none, 103 got only 39 percent. Press coverage in both places was equivalent.

Canvassers employed by 103, operating out of six offices throughout the state, knocked on slightly more than 1 million doors. On election day voter turnout ran to approximately 10 million. That can only mean that the people they talked to talked to others. Clearly that did not occur because of their superior salesmanship, but rather because they were addressing an issue of great concern to people with a solution that was genuine.

- The credibility of an honest person is a treasure of incalculable political value. Proposition 103 was identified with Ralph Nader from the beginning. The most common response from voters asked about the five insurance propositions in the earlier stages of the campaign went something like this: "It's too complicated for me. I'm voting for the one Nader supports." But Nader's advice was accepted by so many people not only because they understood that his integrity has never been compromised. They knew, as well, that today in the public arena few honest people still remain among us.

Unfortunately, these five lessons add up to one simple conclusion. The voters are healthier than the critics think. It's the electoral system that's sick.

Bill Zimmerman is a partner in the Santa Monica political consulting firm, Zimmerman, Fiman & Dixon. His previous clients include Chicago's late Mayor Harold Washington, former New Mexico Gov. Toney Anaya, former Colorado Sen. Gary Hart and numerous progressive ballot propositions.

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