

NEW PARTY NEWS

Building a New Majority from the Ground Up

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Our Favorite Excuses...

Got any co-workers or friends who keep saying that the NP is a great idea, but they never get around to actually joining? Below: a handy reference guide of excuses that you can use to extract their support.

1 My sister's college roomie's cousin has a good job in the Clinton Administration, and she really likes what they're doing.

2 I've got a lot of free time, and figure that I might yet start my own third party.

3 I don't have any time for anything, and just sending money wouldn't be right. I wouldn't want you to become dependent on me.

4 It's impossible to form a new party in America. We need one, but it's impossible. It's all too depressing for words.

5 I'd rather give my money to single-issue groups, because it means I can probably get a lot more direct mail. Oddly, I like direct mail.

6 I'm going with Perot. If we're gonna have a third party, I think it should be run by an insane billionaire.

7 Nobody in America knows any history, so there's no way the New Party can build on earlier traditions of populism and popular education.

8 I believe the country is headed down the right track, and think you people worry too much.

9 I heard that the New Party has already elected some people like me to local public office. This is terrifying.

Need we say more?

Afta NAFTA?

by Mark Ritchie

November 17th is the date of the vote on the North American Free Trade Agreement. Whatever the outcome, the political climate and terrain of the United States has been dramatically changed by this debate.

For the first time since the Depression, there is a genuine debate taking place on economic policy. What's more, this debate is not simply about which flavor of "neoliberal," pro-corporate medicine to swallow, it's about the core principles of our political economy. The fundamentals of Wall Street — 'free' trade, 'free' market, deregulation, globalism, and comparative advantage—have come under strong challenge from many directions at once.

Workers in manufacturing and transport, farmers and small business owners have had enough direct experience with free market trade and deregulation to be immediately suspicious of the NAFTA. For different reasons, non-corporate oriented environmental organizations have also emerged as severe critics of the agreement. For them, the rules negotiated in NAFTA and the even more sweeping GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) talks in Geneva will be used to undermine the gains of the last 20 years in ecological protection and consumer safety.

In essence, the experts have lost control of the debate, and citizens have entered. It's messy, it makes the *Wall Street Journal* nervous, but it's the kind of debate that democracy is supposed to be about. Lined up in favor of the treaty are nearly every important "opinion maker," newspaper editorial pages, most corporate economists, large banking and industrial corporations, and the Clinton administration. Opposing are family farmers, small business owners, environmentalists, and trade unionists. Not exactly an even match, but so far David is beating Goliath. Public opinion polls indicate that about 60% of the public opposes the NAFTA.

Most of the arguments for and against are well known by now. NAFTA supporters claim jobs will be created, critics say they will be destroyed. Supporters argue that illegal immigration from Mexico will be reduced, perhaps hoping to appeal to underlying racism with NAFTA as a way to "keep Mexicans in Mexico". Critics in both the U.S. and Mexico counter that the destruction of small farms and small businesses that will inevitably occur in Mexico will increase immigration pressures. On the important question of sovereignty—the rights of citizens in both countries to maintain public control of their economies, and not to give up all power to private, unaccountable corporations—the pro-NAFTA side is necessarily silent.

continued on page 2

NAFTA *from page 1*

A second noteworthy outcome of the NAFTA battle is the formation of highly diverse coalitions, both at the grassroots and national levels. In Minnesota, for example, 80 groups—from teachers to Catholics, farmers to unions, Hispanic organizations to solidarity networks—have waged an effective campaign as part of the unified Fair Trade Coalition. Some 40 states and cities have similar operations.

I predict that the NAFTA will be defeated next week. I will be proven right or wrong on this in a relatively short period of time. What I am more concerned with, and cannot predict, is whether the progressive political community has the vision, the energy and the courage to build on the progress that we have made so far.

After NAFTA, the crucial challenge we face is shifting to a positive approach to economic and trade policy development. We've done enough criticism of the current NAFTA to transform the public debate and to raise fundamental questions about the bedrock principles of neo-liberalism. The question, now, is whether we can come up with politically realistic proposals for a real North American Development Initiative. What kind of good trade policies will sustain family farmers in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S? What kind of trade policies will help autoworkers in the three countries? What kind of trade policies will protect the environment across North America?

These two fundamental challenges—building on our political advances and moving from criticism to positive policy development—should be a central focus for the New Party. Are we up to the task? Δ

Mark Ritchie is the executive director of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, in Minneapolis, and a charter member of the New Party.

New Party Election Round-Up

The 1993 election cycle is just about over. There are still elections in Little Rock on November 16 in which three New Party members are running for City Director. Everywhere else, last week's elections provide a good opportunity to review progress over the past year, note setbacks, and take a glance towards the future.

New Party chapters have backed candidates in 40 races, and 25 have won election in four states (Wisconsin, Missouri, Montana, Arkansas). City council was the most popular office, followed by county board. (The highest level race last week was Bill Conway's state representative contest in St. Louis county, which we lost by 340 votes).

In two cities — Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Missoula, Montana—New Party chapters have backed candidates that now make up a working majority (or very close to it) on the county board or city council. Of course, one of the core ideas behind the New Party is that getting elected is only the first step.

Governing is hard, and to do so in an accountable and progressive manner is harder still. The issues of sustainable economic development, or school reform, or source reduction will each require a sustained public education and mobilization campaign by local NP chapters and the officials elected with their support. Still, it's an exciting prospect, and we look forward to in-depth reports from these two cities in the months to come.

The successes in '93 were sweet, but we shouldn't overlook the defeats, because the chapters and candidates in New Jersey, New York, Michigan and Minnesota worked just as hard in losing as in winning. Closest (and most heartbreaking) was Atchudta Barkr's effort to oust a 16-year incumbent for City Council in New York, and Anita Estrada's try for the Charter Commission in Detroit. These women, and other candidates not mentioned, deserve the thanks of New Party members everywhere. Their work has set the stage for the future.

Looking towards '94, there are a few dozen races shaping up, both in the spring and fall. Chicago may have its first New Party candidacy, and other states will pick up where they left off. The crucial ingredients: a strong chapter with a committed core of volunteers, a hardworking candidate, some money and a plan. December will be a prime time for local chapters to review their options for '94. Δ

Starting with this issue, New Party News will be published monthly. In addition to news about NP chapters, candidates, and campaigns, we'll feature reports on issues of special interest to NP members. Lets us know what you think of the newsletter and what you'd like to see covered.