

Published on Friday, October 20, 2000 in [Counterpunch](#)

"You Always Hurt The Ones You Love"

The Real Threat is Al Gore, Not Ralph Nader

by Jeffrey St. Clair

Is there a more palpable sign of the neo-liberals' mounting desperation than that they are now warning progressives and Leftists (people they have mocked, ridiculed and triangulated relentlessly for the past 8 years) that a vote for Ralph Nader is the surest way to elect George W. Bush? This is a malicious game of threat of inflation, where Bush (a pathetic moron who resembles no one so much as our greatest president, Gerald Ford) is puffed up into Midland, Texas' own version of Saddam Hussein.

It's a cynical ploy; yet, millions have fallen for it, trembling out of fear. But there's so much more to fear from Gore than Bush, as the last 8 years have proved. Listen to the arch-druid himself, David Brower, 87 years old and still the most radical and militant environmental voice in the US: "Clinton and Gore have done more harm to the environment in 8 years than Bush and Reagan did in 12." This isn't because the neo-liberal team was ideologically to the right of the Reaganauts, but because liberal public interest groups, from NRDC to the Sierra Club, fought the Reagan, Watt, Burford and Bush to a standstill and abetted Clinton and Gore in their sellouts to chemical companies, timber giants, real estate developers and the energy conglomerates.

And it's not just the environment where this scenario has played itself out, but on trade, labor rights, military forays, an austere economic program catered to the bond markets, civil rights, Pentagon spending, expansion of police powers, the vicious war on drugs. Indeed, some of the right-wing's most malign fantasies only reached climax during Clintontime: NAFTA, the emasculation

of the Endangered Species Act, the expansion of the federal death penalty, the undermining of habeas corpus, the hollowing out of affirmative action, slashing the federal workforce by 377,000 jobs, balancing the budget on the backs of the poor.

It's a long and shameful list, but it's probably topped by the infamous welfare bill of 1996. Clinton and Gore came to DC vowing "to end welfare as we know it." After the election, Gore begged to be given welfare "reform" as his issue. He was rebuffed by Hillary and some of the liberals in the Clinton cabinet, who wanted the matter to fade away. After the Democrats were decimated in the 1994 congressional elections, Dick Morris was brought in to save the day. He immediately found a soul-mate in Gore. Together they hatched a wish list of projects, ranging from cracking down on immigrants to condemnations of rap singers and pregnant teens. But the big prize was welfare, which Gore and Morris viewed as their ticket to keep control of the White House for the next 12 years. The Republicans, scrutinizing the same poll numbers, were equally adamant that Clinton and Gore not get "credit" for dismantling welfare. So they concocted bills that were so pernicious and mean-spirited that they knew Clinton would be forced to veto them. He did so five times.

Then in the late summer of 1996, with Clinton and Gore far up in the polls, Dole and Gingrich sent up another welfare bill, nearly as nasty as the previous. A meeting of the Clinton cabinet was convened. Each member spoke out against the bill, even the Lord Protector of Wall Street himself, Robert Rubin. Rubin argued that the bill would put millions of kids out on the streets, homeless and hungry. Gore remained silent throughout the meeting, as stiff one of the kouroi on the Parthenon. The cabinet members shuffled out convinced that a veto would be forthcoming. Then Gore huddled privately with Clinton and his chief of staff, Leon Paneta. Gore argued passionately in favor of signing the bill. He told Clinton that it looked as if the Democrats might regain control of the House and if that happened they would never allow a welfare reform bill to pass. Gore told Clinton: "This may be our only chance to sign a welfare bill." Clinton relented and then told his pals in the Democratic party that they had to reelect him so that he "could fix" all the evil things in the bill he had just signed into law.

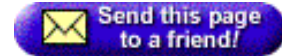
When confronted recently with his career of betrayals of progressive causes, Gore shrugged and said, "I guess you always hurt the ones you love." There you have the toxic essence of the Gore character: ever willing to betray his own party and sacrifice the health and well-being of millions of destitute mothers and children to secure an election that they had no real risk of losing. Bush is a known, if rather maladjusted, quantity. Gore is a political

deviant, anxious to prove himself by knee-capping his most faithful allies.

Ralph Nader isn't perfect; he just seems that way when compared to Bush and Gore. Yet, his run finally offers a campaign to vote for enthusiastically. It is a vote that at the same time repudiates the neo-liberal policies of the Clinton/Gore Democrats and empowers a new political movement, a movement with as much energy, promise and feistiness as the old Rainbow Coalition. A vote for Gore is a vote for pessimism, an admission that the Left is helpless and near dead. It means succumbing to a kind of political necrophilia. A vote for Nader is a vote for optimism and political liberation--a jailbreak from the dank oubliette of the Democratic Party.

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