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Your stolen vote—the missing piece of the puzzle

By Victoria Collier

[Editor's note, Feb. 8, 2001: This article was published *before* the Election 2000 debacle. When they steal our votes, the rest doesn't matter.]

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History has taught us that to seize political power in a country, one has only to control the army and the police. That was before television. Today everyone knows that a country belongs to those who control communications. However, 99 percent of Americans do not know that those who control our communications also control our vote. Quite literally. In other words, we control nothing. Our vote is not even a meaningless piece of paper, because there is no longer a paper ballot. There is only the Kafkaesque reality of the computer voting machine, and the Major Media. The following information is for those who are ready to learn the facts about the theft of the American vote: how, when and why it became the property of corporate America.

If you're one of the 40 percent of Americans who still bother to cast a ballot, it's because, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, you think you can vote the bastards out. You retain this faith in the elections system for one reason: you believe your vote is counted fairly. Otherwise you would join the growing number of citizens regularly taking to the streets in massive protests against the government. That day may yet come. As a die-hard voter, you have yet to ask yourself why, in a democratic republic, should it be necessary to take to the streets at all? Why, in a society of, by and for the people, are citizens faced with police- state brutality when demanding their Constitutional right to gather and to speak freely?

Refusing to abandon hope in the system, you vote, then rush home to get on with your life, trusting your vote is counted fairly by the government with citizen groups keeping a close watch. And like the majority of voters, you never bother to check how your vote is counted. Why should you?

Stalin, a man with an irrefutable understanding of power, put it this way: "He who casts the vote decides nothing. He who counts the vote decides everything."

So my question to you is this: Who counts your vote? You cannot answer because you cannot know how your vote is counted. An easier question is, who stole your vote? That answer has two parts.

Part one: The Corporate Computer

Hand counted paper ballots, the only completely verifiable vote counting system, have been nearly eradicated in the United States over the past thirty years. This wasn't an accident, or the benevolence of progress. The new punch-card system widely instituted across the country was remarkably easy to rig. But documented evidence of massive vote fraud—shaved wheels, pre-printed internal voting results, forged canvass sheets, broken ballot boxes with replaceable seals— created the need for a more subtle approach. Now the punch-card is being replaced by the computer voting machine—the most unverifiable, riggable voting system ever created. There is no longer a paper trail, no way to go back and recount if fraud is suspected. All the workings of the machine are hidden from the public eye, and the eyes of election officials. The corporations that write the vote-counting software don't consider themselves accountable to the public and refuse access to the source codes that program the machines, claiming they are “trade secrets.” These corporations are paid big bucks pedaling their wares to compliant elections officials who willingly step aside, abdicating their responsibility to oversee the safety of the vote count.

According to Dr. Howard Strauss, Princeton University computer scientist, “The computerized voting machine is not a door with no locks, it's a house with no doors.” No candidate or voter can get in, and the possibilities for rigging an election are as varied as the programmer's skills. Where the punch-card system is still in use, the cards are counted by computer. Citizens who, for the past thirty years, have attempted to videotape the punch-card counting process in their counties have been threatened with arrest. In many counties new election officials are trained to believe it is illegal for citizens to watch the vote count!

We are locked out. We now have no way of knowing how our votes are tabulated, we must simply take the word of these corporate computer programmers that they're not accepting bribes to program their software to commit vote fraud—a temptingly simple process, impossible to detect, impossible to get caught. We must, in other words, trust them.

Do you trust them? Do you know who they are? Would it surprise you to learn that Ransom Shoup, the owner of “Shouptronic,” a major voting machine company, was twice convicted of vote fraud in Philadelphia? He's one, who are the rest?

No longer is your neighbor, your grandmother, you or your brother able to take part in the essential democratic process of counting paper ballots and tallying the votes. Even this process has historically been rife with attempted fraud, such as “stuffing” the ballot box. But fraud on this human level is foreseeable and community oversight, if not easy, is certainly possible. Not with computers. We can no longer even watch the vote count, let alone count it ourselves. Because of this, the results are rendered immediately suspect and worthless. But a surprising number of Americans are willing to accept the corporate computer take-over of our voting system as easily as they accept the technological take-over of everything else. The rest of us will have to do better. Let's follow our vote to the next step.

Part Two: The Corporate Media

Once the vote is cast and counted by computers, the unverifiable results are then transferred to Voter News Services (VNS). This little-known private media conglomerate located on 34th street in New York is one of the most powerful corporations in the world. Comprised of all the major networks—NBC, CBS, ABC, CNN, AP, plus the New York Times and the Washington Post—VNS is the only entity tabulating the nation’s votes and disseminating the results to the public. This means that that the dramatic election night “competition” among the Networks to be first with the results is nothing but show business. They all get their numbers from the same place, including the vote “projections” supposedly based on entrance and exit polls also conducted by VNS, though hardly anyone has ever seen VNS pollsters in action. Those vote projections allow the Networks to declare a winner before the polls even close, with an accuracy approaching the metaphysical. Most people watch television on election night simply until they hear the projected winner. That’s enough to convince them and they go to sleep. The trust of the public is unprecedented. So let’s take a closer look at VNS.

VNS has co-opted the American vote count with no public knowledge, no public bid, and remains totally exempt from anti-trust laws. They have absolutely no literature, no brochure, no fax-sheet, and most astoundingly, no Website. They have changed their name three times, yet retained the same public relations secretary. Her name is Lee C. Shapiro. The Executive Director of VNS is Bill Headline, and indeed, headlines are his specialty. But the most interesting thing about VNS is that they will not tell you anything about what they do. They are so scrupulously secretive that they might easily have been formed behind the doors of the KGB, or for that matter, the NSA. They are so powerful that they make no pretenses. No, you cannot watch their operation. No, you cannot get in the door on election night. No, you cannot work for them. You also can’t get a straight answer from them over the telephone as to exactly how they count the vote, where they do it, and who does it for them.

They do not expect to be questioned. A simple telephone call requesting information evokes immediate suspicion. They become hostile and surprisingly nervous. They stammer, stutter and mumble vague contradictions. Then, if your question become too pointed, (example: “Can I bring a videotape to your headquarters on election night to watch you count the vote and tabulate exit polls?”), they will simply hang up on you. Somewhere, Stalin is laughing.

In light of the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO, it shouldn’t surprise us that the vote, like the rest of the world, is in the hands of a few. The major media has carte blanche to manipulate it at will, and the computers guarantee no paper trail. The media for at least half a century has functioned as an effective mouthpiece for corrupt government, for the prison-industrial complex, for the corporate elite, vigorously censoring vital information on ecological destruction and social injustice. We know now that when it comes to elections, despite their “competitive” front, they are truly one organism. If there was any fraud in the VNS vote count, who would report on it? Who is the watchdog? There are none. Not even the alternative press can get their hands on information regarding the count, because VNS simply will not let anyone in the door on election night. It is a secret ballot count.

A number of well known independent investigators have been courageously exposing massive, nation-wide fraud for the past thirty years, including rigged voting machines; an epidemic of corrupt elections officials, League of Women Voter members, and state and Federal judges; and

a treasonous Attorney General Janet Reno, who won her long-held powerful post by single handedly burying vote fraud evidence for over 25 years. But the iron curtain of the major media has slammed down on these investigations despite the FBI documented evidence, making it impossible to bring the truth to the public. The only thorough, reliable source of information has been a book titled "Votescam: The Stealing of America," by James and Kenneth Collier. Published in 1992, the book has been banned by all major book chains. Nevertheless, it has sold over 30,000 copies by word of mouth. The Colliers, America's lead investigators into vote fraud, were not afraid to name the thieves and shed light on a black moment in history: when the government gave up the right to count the vote.

Often told by Barnes and Noble that Votescam is out of print, many have had to search long and hard to find it, until now. The Internet, largely responsible for the success of Seattle and Washington D.C. protests, has emerged as the people's most powerful weapon; free press. Global and instantaneous. All of the vote fraud evidence has been recently posted on two important websites: 216.157.17.151 and www.vote fraud.org. These are the websites of two very different groups. One is a liberal publishing company and the other a conservative political organization, illustrating that fair elections are everyone's responsibility, there are no party lines in this battle. Both these groups are deeply involved in vote fraud investigations, and demand the return to the paper ballot and citizen control. These new sites are already receiving hundreds of visitors each month. Every day more Americans are learning the truth: That the vote count is kept under lock and key by a small group of arrogant people who can be brought down.

Yes, brought down. Like the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank, like any system contrived without us, run by a handful of criminals. Indeed, until we take control of our own election system, the above mentioned global organized crime rings will have to be fought by very unpleasant means. Strikes, shut-downs, lock-downs, protests, brute force, and the gassing, beating, jailing, and possible imprisonment of thousands of Americans. This, at the very least, is what any radical progressive movement can expect. Because as long as the control of the democratic machine in America is in the hands of the corporations, we the people will have NO ACCESS to the workings of the system. We will not be able to elect our own representatives who will clean up the mess the corporate criminals have created. We will be forced to gather outside their gates and scream for justice at our own expense. How long can we continue to do this, and where will it end?

Even after Seattle, it's business as usual at the WTO. China is in, despite the rallying of hundreds of thousands of American workers to oppose the trade deal. Our "elected" representatives certainly aren't worried about not getting enough votes the next time around. Let's free ourselves from the paralyzing confusion of believing we asked for our problems by reelecting the same corrupt leaders who caused them. We've got to take the system back. Let them know we're not going to sleep through the elections any longer, we're going to start organizing. We're going to be running our own candidates, we are not going to accept candidates who are financed by multinational corporations, and we are not going to accept the results of an election counted by corporate computers and the major media. We are going to hand count our own recycled paper ballots. And it's going to take a good goddamned long time to count them, and we won't worry about making the seven o'clock news, because that's the only way we'll know it's fair. Come on, let's vote the bastards out!

Victoria Collier is the daughter of the late James M. Collier, who with his brother, Kenneth F. Collier, wrote "Votescam: The Stealing of America." Ms. Collier also is a freelance reporter for the Global Report.

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