Editorial

Save Elections: Back to Paper!

Four years ago, America suffered a Presidential election which was flawed, first, by the passivity of the electorate in allowing the political parties to rig a "choice" between two candidates each completely incompetent to hold the office; and then, by the partisan failure of election procedures in Florida and the overreaching of the U.S. Supreme Court to "name" George W. Bush President. The 2004 election thus far is threatened, again, by the same problems in worse degree. The first of those grave flaws has been the agreement by *both* major party leaderships to act to keep Democratic candidate Lyndon LaRouche out of the Democratic campaign process; this has given a free ride, for example, to a Dick Cheney who would be out by now, had LaRouche not been excluded by the DNC with all the powers and dirty tricks it could muster. The second grave threat, to the election and the Constitution itself, has been the rapid national spread of planned computer voting to most of the states for the Presidential vote.

This nation's Constitution could not survive the rigging of a Presidential election—whether successful or simply attempted on a significant scale—in the way that widespread computer voting makes such rigging possible. There is already an abundance of evidence from state tests and from computer experts, that computer "touch-screen" voting is susceptible both to random *irreversible* failures (as in California's recent primary), and to undetectable fixing. It must be stopped, and at this stage, the only way to do that is to return to individual paper ballots.

Now, arising from opposition within the states to this "virtual voting," a real possibility has arisen to shove computer voting back in the Pandora's Box it had leaped out of, and close the lid. "Touch-screen" voting is to elections, the same kind of disaster as deregulation was to electricity; and again, California is a key battleground. This time, the state may push the country in the right direction.

LaRouche responded to a questioner at his webcast published in this issue: "A certain faction of Republicans are determined to get the ability to have an election fraud in the order of magnitude as high as 20% of the vote, by electronic voting machines. . . . We're out to stop them. We've been proceeding on a state-by-state level, at the same time we are discussing this . . . in the Congress. And there is action in this direction. There's not enough."

The most important actions so far have been taken by California. Its Secretary of State, Kevin Shelley, acting on unanimous recommendation of a panel which investigated major computer-voting failures in big counties in the state's primary, has decertified Diebold voting computers in four counties, and put strict conditions on their use in ten other counties. The state legislature may go further. The Committee on Elections Reapportionment of the California Senate approved on May 6, by a 3-1 vote, a bill to ban *all touch-screen voting devices* in the November elections. This ban would be unconditional. SB 1723 is sponsored by Republican Sen. Ross Johnson and backed by a leading Democrat, Don Perata. It states: "According to the author, democracy is too important to turn completely over to a machine. But this is what is happening right now with California voters. . . . They have no way of knowing if their votes are recorded accurately or if the machines will be working at all when they arrive at the polls."

As Missouri began deliberations on similar legislation on May 5, including testimony from *EIR* legal editor Edward Spannaus, California's Secretary of State Shelley arrived in Washington to testify at the hearing of the National Commission on Elections. The *New York Times* editorially called for a ban on computer voting.

Congress is thus far only considering modifying the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) to require computers to produce paper records. This won't work: election personnel can't be retrained nationally for a "new" system now; there would still be no real recount capability; and paper records would have fixed *none* of the serious miscounting problems in California's primary. The only reliable election this November, will be one with paper ballots and *no* computers. States have constitutional responsibility, and if Congress does not take real action, they should follow California's and Missouri's example.