

TODAY'S COLUMN

October 18, 2003

"Stop worrying about what he's going to do to you, and start thinking about what you're going to do to him."

That was good advice to his generals when Sam Grant first squared off against Bobby Lee in 1864. And it's good advice today.

You wouldn't know it, though, to listen to Democrats. I had a chance to see how thoroughly it's ignored a few weeks ago, speaking with my county representative to the state Democratic Party. Why, I asked, didn't we take on the Right Wing directly and make them defend themselves?

The answer, delivered in patronizing tones, was pretty unsatisfactory—something about not "going negative" and giving them a chance to counter-attack. As if the Right Wing was some sort of paragon of civic virtue. Exactly the sort of thing that turns people off to getting involved in politics in the first place.

But that's the question, isn't it? Why don't we expose the Right Wing and its so-called ideas for what they are, and make it defend itself? Why aren't we calling them out as liars who front for the worst in corporate America, and claim to champion the common man?

Sure, the Presidential hopefuls are finally attacking the Liar-in-Chief more than each other. But they're still allowing the Republicans to set the terms of the debate, and still telling themselves that not shining a light on the Right Wing is wisdom, instead of folly.

The Democrats have an historic opportunity here. If they handle it right, they can not only rescue the nation from the Right Wing's coils, but set the terms for the debate for the foreseeable future—something the Republicans have been able to do since 9/11, and something President Clinton was able to do every day of his presidency—driving the Right Wing nuts in the process.

Democrats can also, if they're exceptionally smart, recapture a lot of the electorate that they lost in the 1980s by allowing the Right Wing to peel off disaffected union members, and other voters, by feeding them reasonable-

sounding lies about how to fix what was wrong with the country, even though they in fact worked for what was making it bad in the first place.

The truth is that once you get away from the so-called issues dividing the electoral debate, there's enormous agreement about what's wrong with the country, and about what's making it wrong—that is, big corporations and their undue influence over government.

I was talking to a local Republican committeeman about this today, and he agreed completely. He can even see that the Republican tilt towards big business is murdering the independent businessman, and turning the country over to huge concentrations of capital—what Teddy Roosevelt called "Malefactors of great wealth"—that don't even pay U.S. taxes, because they've re-incorporated in Bermuda.

And, he said, he thinks that if the new Republicans that have been peeled away from the Democratic Party by the lies of Right Wing talk radio can be convinced they've been lied to, they'll abandon the GOP. And remember, I live in farming country in central New York State, surrounded by people who were born into the Republican Party.

That sort of opening is big enough to drive more than one election through--it's enough to take back the country. And the way to do it, in my opinion, is to remember that the GOP was a minority party until the Democrats alienated their natural constituency, and talk radio began attracting them with angry-sounding lies.

People in this country have a deep sense something about it has gone wrong. The big issue for the average person aren't global warming or gay rights—that's no slap at either--but why life in this country is getting worse. People can remember when ordinary working people could live a decent life and send their kids to college, and know that today, they're lucky to keep their jobs and their homes.

And they recognize instinctively that this world--with no give in it, that thinks slippery answers to straightforward questions are acceptable--is the result of big corporations that can tell you to take it or leave it, and that make the rules for government as well: Literally, since it's no secret that corporate lobbyists write many of the bills that make their way to the President's desk.

But the GOP's megaphones on talk radio—think people like our friendly drug addict, Mr. Limbaugh—were able to substitute big government for big business in the minds of their listeners, people who were trying to think for themselves about what was wrong with the country. Combined with a patronizing, we-know-best attitude among Democrats toward their rank-and-file, it's not surprising they drove enough voters into the arms of the GOP so that, together with the high-motivated Right Wing, the electorate is now pretty evenly split.

Watching the Bushies self-destruct over the past few weeks has given great comfort to the forces of light. The obvious prospect of a 20-year occupation of Iraq. Mr. Limbaugh's confession. The treason of the Wilson affair, magnified by open foot-dragging by Ashcroft. Back-to-back annual rises in the nation's poverty rates. A hollow, jobless recovery. Admissions that there was no link between al Qaeda and Iraq.

Add to this the obvious war between the White House and the intelligence community over how Rove & Co. ignored, distorted, and lied about the reasons for invading Iraq, and then blaming it on the CIA--and recognize that in Washington, the CIA is forever, but the President is only for a maximum of 8 years—and you've got a firm basis for winning the Presidential election and maybe even throwing out the likes of Santorum and DeLay.

But this will never happen if the Democratic leadership doesn't flank the Right Wing's position, roll up its lines, and drive it from the field. To do this, it has to hit 'em where they ain't and force the GOP to defend itself, instead of letting them set the terms of the debate.

The country is ready for them do this. Even mainstream Republicans don't like the people who've hijacked their party. And the man on the street sees with perfect clarity the strong-arm tactics, extortion, and outright lies that comprise most of the Right Wing's everyday business tactics. It offends the American sense of fair play, even among the rough-and-tumble of politics.

But just as Lincoln told another Democrat, George McLellan, "You must act." If the Democratic Party doesn't take on the Right Wing directly, it won't only lose the election; it'll abandon the nation to their mercies.

Not a pretty prospect.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

STOPBUSHIN04 hopes to create a community of citizens who can help send Bush and his Right Wing masters back to the 19th Century, so we welcome your observations, comments, rants, and hate mail.

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