Nader, Buchanan Slam Gore, Bush on Energy

by Jeffrey Steinberg

There is good reason why Al Gore and George W. Bush agreed on at least one thing: Under no circumstances would Ralph Nader or Pat Buchanan be allowed near the so-called Presidential debates. Indeed, when Nader showed up in Boston to attend the first of three scheduled "major Presidential candidates" debates, with a ticket to sit silently in the audience, he was tossed out by some of Boston's finest, before the TV cameras started rolling.

One issue that occupied a good deal of time in that first debate was how Gore and Bush would handle the energy price crisis. Both "front-runners" pandered to the oil cartel interests, dodged all of the important facets of the crisis, and, instead, got into what looked a lot like a pre-rigged "debate" over the fate of Alaska's north slope oil and gas reserves.

Nader and Buchanan, while flawed in their responses to the energy crisis, are light-years ahead of the two great debaters on this vital issue. Nader, the Green Party Presidential candidate, and Buchanan, the nominee of the Reform Party, recently issued written policy statements on the energy crisis.

On Sept. 21, Nader, in a press release headlined "Gore's Unworkable Election-Year Ploy Unmasked by His Eight-Year Record on Big Oil," charged that "for almost eight years, Clinton and Gore have surrendered to the demands of big oil companies. They have rubber-stamped most giant oil mergers, which have concentrated markets and pricing power. They have ignored the contraction of refining capacity, thereby allowing shut-downs to contract gasoline supplies and skyrocket prices by 40% or more." He said, "There has been no White House jawboning, no subpoena-equipped Justice Department investigations into how domestic down-stream refinery and pipeline glitches result in huge profits and consumer losses."

In a telephone interview with *EIR* on Sept. 29, Nader underscored that the Clinton-Gore Administration "messed up in so many ways" that they deserve "severe censure and condemnation for their surrender to big oil interests." He added that the increased power of the oil cartels "neutralized" any impact of the release of part of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, because the cartels could manipulate supplies to continue driving up prices.

Attached to Nader's Sept. 21 press statement was a letter he sent in August to Gore and Bush, urging them to join him in pressing for a reversal of the deregulation of the electricity industry. Citing the 250% jump in electricity prices in the San Diego, California area since May, Nader asked what "the cause of this consumer disaster" was. He answered: "The deregulation of electricity: a radical reversal of the public's historic approach to managing the energy monopolies." Calling California's deregulation "fraudulent at the inception," he declared that "it makes no sense to turn an absolute necessity of modern life, health, and economic prosperity—electricity—into a commodity subject to the whims of a handful of power corporations, which use their oligopolistic might over the marketplace to obtain excessive profits. . . . 'Free market' principles do not apply to the distribution of electricity, which is a service suited only to a regulated monopoly."

However, Nader's notorious opposition to expansion of nuclear energy in the United States introduces a flaw in the approach he would take to solving the energy price crisis as President. But his diagnosis of the roots of the present energy price crisis are not far from the points emphasized by Lyndon LaRouche in his ten-point proposal for ending the energy price emergency (reprinted in this issue).

Wrong Target, Better Solutions

In contrast to Nader, Buchanan, in a speech at Boston University on March 31 (at the outset of the oil price spike), blamed the crisis on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and other foreign oil-producing nations, including Nigeria, Norway, Indonesia, and even Ecuador. Buchanan assailed a "global price-rigging conspiracy," which he called "the dark side of globalization," but left the oil cartels and the spot-market speculators out of his equation.

But, once Buchanan got around to presenting his own solution to the crisis, a bit more sanity was evident. First, he called for the United States to pursue a genuine policy of energy independence, through expansion of domestic oil and natural gas exploration and drilling. He called for setting "a floor price of oil," with an "import fee" that would kick in "to support domestic prices, to keep U.S. wells producing and the price of our natural gas competitive." "Over the last 15 years," he said, "U.S. oil production has fallen by 2.7 million barrels a day. In 1981, we had 4,500 active rotary drilling rigs; today we have only 760." In addition to demanding tax incentives for new production, he called for America to revive its nuclear power industry. "France generates 76% of its electricity with nuclear power; Sweden, 46%; and South Korea, 41%. . . . We invented nuclear power. Why let others exploit its potential while we are too frightened to do so?"

Buchanan concluded, "To show we mean business, the U.S. should negotiate an end to sanctions on Iran and Iraq, sell both all the oil-drilling equipment they wish to buy, and let them sell all the oil they want on the world market. . . . Lifting sanctions on Iraq would also end an economic war, the primary casualties of which have been that country's innocent, elderly, sick, and young."

Flawed, for sure, but far more reality-oriented than the babble coming from the mouths of Bush and Gore.