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**Election Issues**

**The globalization of electronic election theft**

by *Bob Fittrakis & Harvey Wasserman*

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From Ohio and California to Scotland and France, the disputes surrounding electronic voting machines have gone truly global.

E-voting machines have already been extensively studied and condemned by a wide range of expert committees, commissions and colleges, including the General Accountability Office, the Carter-Baker Commission, Johns Hopkins University, Princeton University, Stanford University and others. Rigging of a recount in Cleveland has resulted in two felony convictions. The failures of e-voting machines have been the subject of numerous documentary films, including the aptly titled HBO special "Hacking Democracy."

Now the secretaries of state in Ohio and California are subjecting e-voting to still more official review. Ohio's Jennifer Brunner has announced she'll seek bids to conduct independent studies of both touch-screen machines, which record votes electronically, and optical scanners, which tabulate paper ballots electronically.

Brunner has already removed the entire board of elections of Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) in part because of a major fiasco caused by new electronic machines in the state's 2006 primary election. Voting rights activists vehemently opposed the \$20 million purchase, but it was rammed through by Board Chair Robert Bennett and Executive Director Michael Vu.

The machines then caused long reporting delays. Vu resigned under pressure from the board. Bennett then resigned---along with the rest of the board---under pressure from Brunner. Bennett chairs the Ohio Republican Party, works closely with White House advisor Karl Rove, and was instrumental in delivering Ohio's decisive votes to George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election. Two felony convictions have so far arisen from what prosecutors call a "rigged" recount that occurred that year in Cleveland, under Bennett's supervision.

The specifics of Brunner's investigation, which she wants done by September, are not yet public. But the newly elected Democrat says she intends to "fill in the gaps" on studies of Diebold, ES&S and Hart InterCivic machines whose vote tallies were key to giving Bush a second term. The conservative Columbus Dispatch has already predicted that the results of the investigation "likely will disappoint conspiracy theorists."

California's new Secretary of State Deborah Bowen will begin her study May 14, and wants it done by late July. An interagency agreement with the University of California will use three "top-to-bottom review teams" with about seven people each to inspect documents, previous studies, computer source code and a penetration attack to test system security. Cost is estimated at \$1.8 million to be covered by system vendors and the Help America Vote Act. Systems from Diebold, ES&S, HartInterCivic, Sequoia and InkaVote of Los Angeles will be examined.

Other states are also re-evaluating their electronic voting systems, and fierce controversy is raging nationwide over a federal bill from Representative Rush Holt (D-NJ) which institutes certain voting reforms but allows the use of electronic machines to continue.

Now the issue has spread worldwide. Widespread cries of theft and fraud erupted in Ukraine, just before the US 2004 election. A forced re-vote ousted the "official" winner.

In Mexico, leftists contend the recent presidential election there was stolen just as Bush did it in the US, with some of the same personnel pulling it off.

Now similar cries are coming from Scotland and France. May 3 elections in Scotland using new electronic counting systems resulted in as many as 100,000 votes being classed as "spoilt papers." (About 90,000 such ballots from Ohio 2004 remain uncounted to this day).

Complex methods of tabulating and weighting the Scottish votes yielded "chaos." Several vote counts were suspended. In some races the tally of rejected ballots was greater than some candidates' winning margin. "This is a temporary interruption to one small aspect of the overall process," says a spokeswoman for DRS, the company responsible for the vote counting technology.

The language in France has not been so polite. A watershed presidential election has just been won by Nicolas Sarkozy, a blunt right-wing Reagan-Bush-style extremist over the



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socialist Segolene Royal. Sarkozy is a hard-edged authoritarian whose intense anti-immigrant rhetoric matches his support for the American war in Iraq and his avowed intent to slash France's social service system, including a public health program widely considered among the best in the world.

Like the balloting in Ukraine, the US, Scotland and Mexico, Sarkozy's victory was marred by angry, widespread complaints about dubious vote counts whose discrepancies always seem to favor the rightist candidate. Throughout France, the cry has arisen that the conservatives have done to Segolene Royal what Bush/Rove did to John Kerry.

In the not-so-distant past, other elections were engineered by George H.W. Bush, head of the Central Intelligence Agency and father of the current White House resident. During the Reagan-Bush presidencies, in the Philippines, Nicaragua, El Salvador and other key third world nations, expected leftist triumphs somehow morphed into rightist coups. "CIA destabilizations are nothing new," said former CIA station chief and Medal of Merit winner John Stockwell in 1987. "Guatemala in 1954, Brazil, Ghana, Chile, the Congo, Iran, Panama, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay---the CIA organized the overthrow of constitutional democracy."

The recent trend to privatizing vote counts, with corporations claiming "proprietary rights" to keep their hardware and software covert, has added a new dimension to an old tradition. The recent "e-victories" in the US and France have significantly tipped to the right the global balance among the major powers. So while Ohio and California conduct their studies of electronic voting, the whole world will be watching.

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Bob Fitrakis's forthcoming book, THE FITRAKIS FILES: COPS, COVERUPS AND CORRUPTION, is at <http://www.freepress.org/>, where this article first appeared. Harvey Wasserman's SOLARTOPIA! OUR GREEN-POWERED EARTH, A.D. 2030, is at <http://www.solartopia.org/>.

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