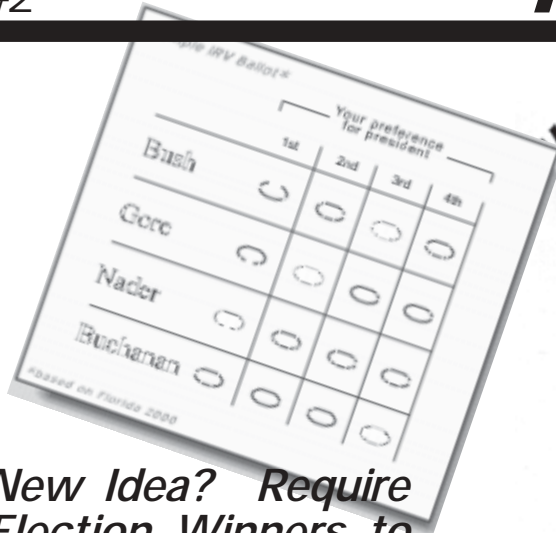


Armchair **ACTIVIST**

#2



May 2001



New Idea? Require Election Winners to Get a Majority of the Vote

by Craig Harvey, Huron Valley Greens

That's what runoff elections provide, and Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) is even better. Ann Arbor used to have it. But now we, like most areas of the U.S., use a rather unrepresentative method of counting votes that allows winning an election with less than a majority of the vote in a multi-party election.

What is Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) ?

Instant runoff voting (IRV) is an election reform that is rapidly gaining attention throughout the United States. In IRV voters rank candidates as their first choice, second choice, third, and so on. If a candidate does not receive a clear majority of votes on the first count, a series of runoff counts are conducted, eliminating the lowest vote-getters one at a time, and retallying using 2nd and 3rd choice votes from those ballots -- just as if they were voting in a traditional runoff election. This process continues until one candidate achieves more than fifty percent of the vote.

The picture above shows a simplified sample IRV ballot for the recent presidential election.

Instant runoff voting allows all voters to vote for their favorite candidate without fear of helping elect their least favorite candidate, and it ensures that the winner enjoys true support from a majority of the voters. Plurality voting, used in most American elections, does not meet these basic requirements for a fair election system that promotes wide participation.

IRV has been in successful use for decades in Australia and is used to elect the President of the Republic of Ireland and, most recently, the mayor of London, England. And the American Political Science Association, which includes the psephologists (voting experts) uses IRV to elect its officers.

Ann Arbor Makes History

The most recent use of IRV for a governmental election in the U.S. was in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. The presence in Ann Arbor of a strong third party, the Human Rights Party, created a lively three-way election. Republican Mayor James Stephenson was up for reelection in April 1975. In the previous election he had won with only 47% of the vote.

There were concerns about the Human Rights Party splintering the vote and giving Stephenson yet another win with less than a majority of the votes. So, in 1974 the Human Rights Party led a successful local petition drive and managed to place the following question on the November 1974 Ann Arbor ballot:

"Shall the City Charter be amended to provide that the Mayor shall be elected by a majority of voters, by permitting each voter to designate a first preference and subsequent preferences; so that if no candidate receives a majority of first preferences, then the candidate with the fewest such votes is eliminated and second preferences of the voters for that candidate are counted instead, the process being repeated until one candidate receives a majority of valid votes?"

This won the approval of about 52% of the voters. Voting was mostly along partisan lines (Democrats for/Republicans against).

In March of 1975, prior to the April city election, there was a public hearing and a city-wide mailing to educate voters on how the system would work.

In the April 1975 election the use of Instant Runoff Voting led to the election of the first ever African-American Mayor (Democrat Al Wheeler). This occurred because of the strength of second-choice votes transferred from the Human Rights Party candidate. In the first preferences the tally showed:

Democrats 40%, Republicans 49%, Human Rights Party 11%

But since most of the HRP voters chose Wheeler (Dem) as their second choice, he won the final tally.

An initial legal challenge failed as the courts upheld the IRV law. But the Republicans led a further repeal effort, and in a low turnout special election in April 1976 the use of IRV in Ann Arbor was killed. It was one of the only Ann Arbor elections where more Republicans than Democrats went to the polls. The time has come for Ann Arbor to reclaim its heritage as a city capable of dealing fairly with multiple parties in elections, and lead the way for other municipalities around Michigan to learn what it is like to really vote one's preferences.

More information:

Web: www.fairvote.org, www.migreens.org
Phone: Huron Valley Greens: 734-663-3555

Many thanks to John Gear, Center for Voting and Democracy, for much of the information in this article. And thanks also to Benjamin Walter, former Ann Arbor resident, who researched Ann Arbor News articles from the mid-1970's.]

Road Trips!

Support Activism at the Ark

What: Utah Phillips comes to the Ark--not a demo but a social resister getting people riled up.

When: May 19

Where: The Ark, Main St.

Meet the Mayor!

What: National Mayors Conference in Detroit

When: June 22-26

Where: ummhh... Detroit

Look for more information on events and shadow conferences as the time draws near. Expect a large turnout. (P)resident Bush/Cheney will be in attendance. The conference will focus on how privatization will supposedly help our nation's cities. Expect to hear a city-wide chuckle from the town that still remembers Robocop.



UPCON2001

What: THE UNDERGROUND PUBLISHING CONFERENCE 2001

One weekend. Hundreds of people. Thousands of projects. Infinite inspiration. Discussions, presentations, and workshops by and for people who create and participate in the world of alternative media.

UPCON2001 is a conference for Zinesters, Activists, Comic Artists, Hackers, Low Power FM Broadcasters, Librarians, Web Designers, Filmmakers, Musicians, Artists, Academics, Street Theorists, Readers and Writers. In other words, YOU!

When: June 23-24th, 2001

Where: Bowling Green, Ohio

Contact:
UPCON2001
216 South Church Street
Bowling Green, OH 43402
upc2001@hotmail.com



CRIME NOTES

by Cary Burt

Jealous Traveling Salesman Targets Rival's Religion With Hate-Speech Graffiti

In an amusing case for those of us with our eyes peeled for inane corporate behavior, Proctor & Gamble recently sued Amway for spreading a rumor that Proctor & Gamble's CEO appeared on a talk show and confessed his devotion to Satan and that he regularly contributes money to the Church of Satan. Randy Haugen, an Amway distributor, caught wind of the news and sent information about it in a friendly cautionary email to co-workers. Amway's structure is so intricate, however, that the email ultimately landed in the inboxes of thousands of distributors under him. Following Mr. Haugen's spamming, Proctor & Gamble received thousands of calls criticizing Satan worship. Most of the callers were from the states in which Mr. Haugen's distributors operate. Mr. Haugen hastily sent out a retraction. The case was remanded by the United States Court of Appeals in order to determine whether Amway spread the rumor as part of an economic plan to woo Proctor & Gamble's customers.

Woman Sexually Abused With Board, Suffers Severe Cuts

In this appeal case, Nancy Wanchik, former CEO of First Care Health Plan, called for a reexamination of a previous lawsuit in which Ms. Wanchik filed charges against her co-workers for sexual harassment and intimidation. When her company was taken over by Great Lakes Health Plan, Inc., a Michigan-based HMO, Ms. Wanchik claims that the CEO of Great Lakes, Donald Zinner, along with several other male members of Great Lakes's Board of Directors began a routine of intimidation in the work place in the name of "humbling" her. This intimidation allegedly included sexual derogation and crude critiques of the bodies of Ms. Wanchik and her female colleagues, as well as a general exclusion of Ms. Wanchik from important administrative meetings. In order to escape the "humbling" campaign of the employees of her new parent company, Ms. Wanchik left First Care and took a pay cut. The United States Court of Appeals did not find in favor of Ms. Wanchik, however, for she could not prove that her employers specifically inflicted such emotional abuse nor could she prove that they were aware of or sanctioned the behavior. Rather, the Court decided that while the alleged assailants were on the Board of Directors, Ms. Wanchik's evidence implicated them as co-workers because they had no real authority over her employment. The Court did, however, remand the case for further investigation.

Congressmembers Convicted in 5-year-old Money-for-Submissive-Behavior Ring

In February, a decision made by the United States Supreme Court laid the foundation for improvements in the treatment of legal cases involving welfare recipients. Legal Services Corporation acts as an umbrella group that apportions funds from Congress to various legal groups that represent impoverished citizens. Since 1996, Congress has forbade the appropriation of such funds to groups that hear cases which challenge or seek to uproot welfare law as it stands. In *Legal Services Corporation v. Carmen Velazquez*, LSC sought to drop the Congressional restriction. The Supreme Court ruled the Congressional restriction unconstitutional, heralding a fairer legal environment for the nation's poor and laying the groundwork for a broader critique of the distribution of Congressional funds.

With contributions by:

Joe Sexauer {editor + writing}
 Mark Dilley, Craig Harvey, Brendan Hill {writing}
 Cary Burt {crime reporter} ||| SinSin {graphics}
 Anonymous {Unattributeds}

Support Your Local Firefighters

I experienced a house fire several years ago. My friend Kari got a call from her family, saying there had been a fire at her parents house. She called me to drive her there. It was an odd drive. We knew not what to expect.

When we rounded the drive to view the house, the only thing left standing was the door frame. It was instantly traumatizing to see the power of fire. The house was nothing but ash.

Right here in the City of Ann Arbor, in an effort to save money, there is a campaign to cut the fire dept budget down some more. I spoke with Steve Lowe, President of the Local 693 International Association of Fire Fighters, and this is what he described to me:

- There are 118 union firefighters - everyone but the fire chief and support staff. 8 fire trucks in Ann Arbor now. 3 people per truck daily.
- The city has budgeted for only 4 prevention specialists, and 1 mechanic (for 7 trucks and 30 other vehicles at 6 stations!!!)
- 10 years ago Ann Arbor had 9 trucks. Now we're budgeted for 7 trucks - already a 23% reduction.
- Response time is down.
- Across the nation 100 fire fighter deaths per year currently.
- Fires down, but faster, hotter burns, and materials increasingly toxic.
- 40% increase in fire calls in the last 10 years.
- Aging buildings and population increase fire hazard situations.
- Bottom line, the city is trying to cut the staff by 17 people, or 14% from an already lean budget.
- Basically this is a work speed up like on an assembly line. But in this instance it is with one of the most dangerous things.....fire.

Support the fire fighters:

Call or email Mayor John Hieftje.

Phone: 994-2766

Email: jhieftjc@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us

Sweatshops in the Fields: The Taco Bell Boycott

Since March 28th, farm workers who pick the tomatoes that end up in your Chalupa and tacos at Taco Bell have called for a boycott. They work under harsh and brutal conditions. They have formed the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to demand dignity and a livable wage.

"To a significant extent, Taco Bell's tremendous global revenues are based on cheap ingredients for the food they sell, including cheap tomatoes picked by farmworkers in Florida paid sub-poverty wages" said Lucas Benitez of the CIW.

According to the latest U.S. Department of Labor report to Congress, farmworkers earn a median annual income of \$7,500, with no benefits and no legal right to earn overtime or collectively bargain with their employers.



"Well, we as farmworkers are tired of subsidizing Taco Bell's profits with our poverty" Benitez continues. "We are calling for this boycott as a first step toward winning back what is rightfully ours -- a fair wage and respect for the hard and dangerous work we do."

Support people as they stand up for dignity and a better community. Boycott Taco Bell.

Tell your friends and family to boycott Taco Bell.

Check out the following contacts for more information and ways to help:

Phone: (941) 657-8311

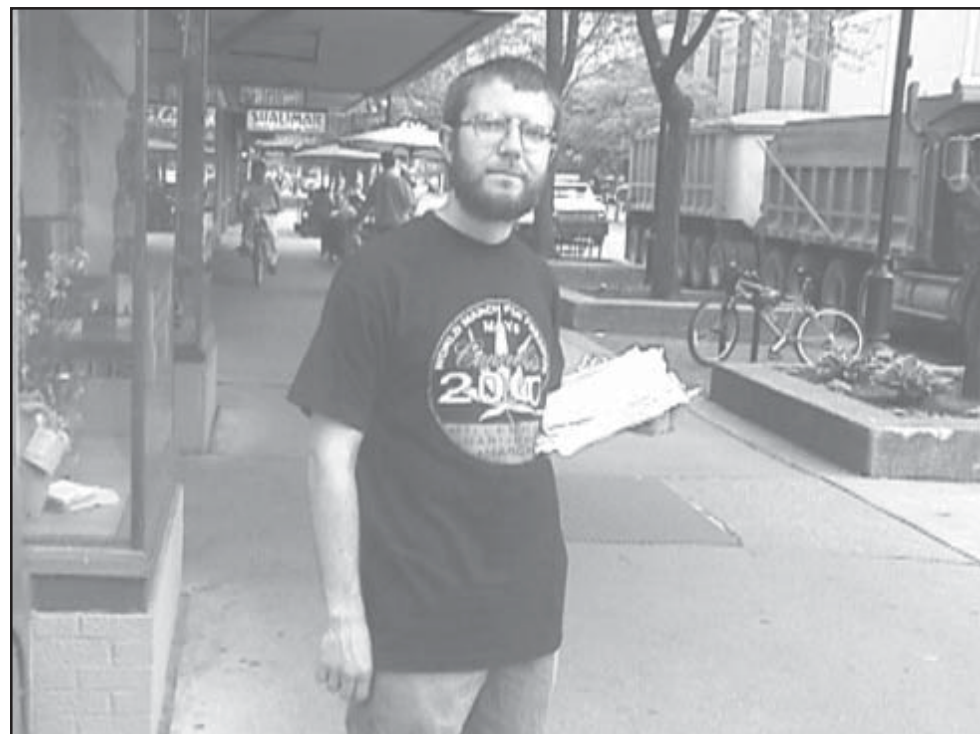
Web: <http://www.ciw-online.org/index2.html>

Mail:

Coalition of Immokalee Workers

P. O. Box 603

Immokalee, FL 34143



Ann Arbor's J.P. Denoyer fights the drug war at home working for the decriminalization of marijuana

Decriminalize it. Don't criticize it!

I want you to learn a little bit about the PRA and what you can do to end the Prohibition of Marijuana. If you haven't heard of the Personal Responsibility Amendment, you must not have been walking around downtown lately. Advocates of the PRA are easily spotted on busy street corners passing petitions to get it on the ballot. For those of you who might be hesitant about supporting it, this Amendment is by no means a radical piece of legislation. The PRA is a reasonable response to the ridiculous war on drugs in response to marijuana smoking. It is not a piece of legislation to make a new industry based around pot. It is based on principles of decriminalization, which means that it is legal for adults over the age of 21 to possess small amounts of pot.

The other big part of this amendment is that it allows farmers to grow and sell hemp that does not contain THC (the chemical that makes one high after smoking). The American Economy is flooded with hemp products from hemp that is grown other places (things from rope and clothes), why not allow family farmers in Michigan to participate in this profitable venture? Without THC, the hemp would be worthless for recreational use, but it would still be a productive asset to help revive Michigan's flagging farming industry.

What you can do: So, you too can get involved to end the ridiculous war on drugs when it comes to marijuana. First of all, get educated on both the PRA and marijuana in general. There is plenty of info and the text of the PRA on the web at <http://www.prayer.com/>. There are plenty of other sources on the history of the recent prohibition of marijuana, the reasons for it, and the industrial uses of pot. One of the best sources I have ever seen is *The Emperor Wears No Clothes* by Jack Hearaw. Once you are informed, spread the word. Talk to your family/friends/co-workers/etc. about it. You can

download copies of the petition from <http://www.petition2vote.com> and help the petition yourself.

If all that fails, you could just be an Armchair Activist and donate to PRAYes: PRAYes Committee 5065 State-PMB 350 Saginaw, MI 48603



Support your local fire fighters by calling Mayor Hieftje

Thanks for reading!

If you would like to contribute to or have any feedback for The Armchair Activist we would love to hear from you! Simply email Joe at: jsexauer@umich.edu

