

WHAT KIND OF TWO PARTY SYSTEM IS THIS?
*Introducing Ralph Nader, Green Party Presidential Candidate at the
Friends Meeting House in Wilmington -- 7/28/2000*

By Vivian Houghton

Hello. I'm here this morning to introduce Ralph Nader, the Green Party's candidate for President of the United States. But before introducing Mr. Nader, I'd like to take a few minutes and briefly talk about some things that hopefully will put his visit here today in perspective.

First of all, let me state the obvious. This is not a good time in U.S. politics. So many people are turned off by the moral bankruptcy of the country's two major political parties that less than 50% of the country's eligible voters have voted in recent presidential elections.

This problem of the public's disillusionment with the political status quo didn't just start yesterday. It's been going on for decades. The political establishment, however, preferred not to talk about it.

But the time for silence is over. We did not just show up here this morning by accident. The truth is that a growing feeling of political alienation has been sweeping our country for years.

Almost 20 years ago, in 1981, the Urban League did a study of nonvoters. The study concluded that the highest percentage of nonvoters - 49.4% - didn't vote because they thought the candidates weren't in tune with real people's concerns. The study also showed that the second highest percentage of non-voters - 32.2% - didn't cast ballots because they were - and this is a direct quote - "Fed up with the whole political system." Unfortunately, since that Urban League study was completed, our nation's political leaders have done nothing to restore public confidence in politics as usual. Consequently, since 1981 the only change in people's attitude towards politics as usual is that now *more* people have become disgusted by the political status quo, *more* people have been disillusioned by the two parties' enslavement to the corporate agenda.

This is why someone like myself - a feminist and political activist known mostly for my work within the Democratic Party - this is why I can no longer rationalize staying within the Democratic Party. It and the Republican Party are too much a part of this country's problems to provide a solution to those problems. And I'm certainly not the only one who feels like this in Wilmington and the rest of the state. For instance, I know that Jake Kreshtool - who was Delaware's Democratic candidate for governor in 1988 - is now a Nader supporter and a registered Green Party member. The Nader campaign also has attracted disgruntled Republicans, angry Independents, dissident non-voters, frustrated people of color, and upset unionists who want to be part of a long-term struggle to

redefine democracy in America. And we *must* redefine it. This year as well as over coming years, while Rep. and Dem. politicians grow more mentally sluggish as they wine and dine with corporate lobbyists in posh restaurants, we will build a grassroots movement that thinks clearly, plans carefully and battles to restore the U.S. to “we the people.” This is what the Nader campaign and Green Party and its allies are all about.

The reasons for building a grassroots movement exist right here in Delaware. We just have to look around to see them. Let me give just two examples.

Example #1. As everybody knows, for at least two decades local government has been writing special laws and developing special tax breaks to lure companies into Delaware, particularly Wilmington. The idea behind these laws and tax breaks was that if the public was nice to big business, then big business’s profits would trickle down to the local population. Yet in spite of the fact that Wilmington’s corporate skyline has grown, many of the city’s historical problems - like economic inequality along racial lines - have not changed. For instance, although there has been a growth in the city’s black middle class, the average black still suffers from economic racism. This is shown by the fact that the per capita income of city whites is \$21,615, compared to \$9,016 for blacks, a more than 2 to 1 disparity. Also, 1.8 times more black youths age 17 or under live in poverty than do white youths in the same age bracket. The tax breaks and other forms of corporate welfare given to the area’s biggest financial institutions have not been successfully reinvested in the community in such a way as to abolish such problems. What city residents have gotten instead is a corporate driven urban redevelopment plan designed to make the city comfortable for suburbanites and visiting business people. As these outsiders take advantage of the city’s new development, they are served by waiters, waitresses, fast-food workers, ballpark ushers, tellers, bellhops, store clerks and a variety of other low-paid city residents. Meanwhile, Wilmington’s better-paying work disappears as city gov’t cuts jobs to save money and DuPont downsizes to get more “efficient.” While the companies play, we pay.

Example #2. As local people know, MBNA gets whatever it wants from the City of Wilmington. Recently it pressured the city into giving the bank a zoning variance for a helicopter-landing pad on top of one of its buildings. Yet while MBNA gets whatever it wants just about overnight - and gets these things in spite of local residents’ complaints - these same residents often have to wait years to have their own requests fulfilled, even when these requests have to do with their lives and health. For instance, only in 1999, after years of community complaining, did local government acknowledge there was a contamination problem in Wilmington’s 7th St. Peninsula area. Between 1969 and 1977, 27 drums of toxic chemicals were dumped there. Yet the state only acknowledged the problem in 1999 after signs of the toxic wastes were found in an area where children played. What kind of two-party system is it in which neither party leads the fight to prioritize citizens’ lives over corporate rights? I’ll tell you what kind of two-party system would do this - a *bad* one, one that we must now abandon!

These are some of the reasons that Delawareans, like people in other states, have a growing interest in third party efforts to redefine U.S. democracy. The pundits can be cynical if they want, but history is strewn with examples of movements gaining strength and power against the odds. The women's suffrage movement did it. The union movement did it in the 1930s. And the civil rights/black power movement did it in the 1950s and 60s.

Now let me present to you Ralph Nader, who doesn't really need an introduction. He is the country's best-known consumer advocate. He is a fighter against corporate injustice. He is a believer in that kind of democracy in which ordinary people actually have power. Since taking on General Motors thirty years ago and forcing them to improve their safety measures, Ralph Nader has never once shied away from a just struggle between ordinary people and the giant institutions that want to control our lives. On behalf of the Green Party of Delaware, I welcome -- and present to you -- Ralph Nader, Green Party candidate for President of the United States!