Desperate Dems no match for Arnie

BY MARK STEYN SUN-TIMES COLUMNIST

You gotta admire the way the media stayed on the Democrats' sinking California ship right to the very end. On the CNN Web site, even after Gray Davis had conceded, they were sticking to the loser's talking-points:

"Schwarzenegger, who, like Hitler, is a native of Austria . . ."

CNN? Oh, that's that network with Larry King, who, like the Son of Sam, is a native of Brooklyn. Used to be owned by Ted Turner, who, like the Cincinnati Strangler, is a native of Cincinnati. Now part of Time Warner, founded by the Warner Brothers, the oldest of whom, Harry Warner, like many Auschwitz guards, was a native of Poland.

Anyway, the good news is that residents of the Golden Reich still have the right to recall their new fuhrer from his bunker in Sacramento, and he probably won't make Jews wear yellow stars and gays wear pink triangles because the fabric costs for Hollywood and San Francisco alone would double the deficit.

But even on the day after, the Dems wouldn't lay off the Nazi cracks. "It was the triumph of the swill," said Paul Maslin, in an allusion to the late Leni Riefenstahl's Hitler-glorifying documentary "Triumph of the Will." Arnold's not just a Nazi, he's Nazi garbage!

Maslin is Gray Davis' pollster. Maybe he should poll-test his jokes.

Incidentally, if there was any triumph of the swill in this election, it was surely Maslin's remarkable success in persuading so many media outlets to buy into the Gray Davis spin that their "internal polls" showed the race was "tightening." Hence, hilarious headlines like the Washington Post's on Election Day: "On Eve Of Vote, California Race Remains Fluid" -- "fluid" in the sense that Cruz Bustamante's defeat might be merely humiliating instead of shattering?

Either Maslin was intentionally shoveling swill at the Los Angeles Times and his other chums or he's an incredibly bad pollster. Given that there were similar discrepancies between alleged Democratic "internal polls" and the real world in November 2002, either explanation could be valid. But the press bought the Democratic spin and in turn the Democrats bought the subsequent media spin. Both parties bolstered each other's delusions. As I wrote after last year's elections: "Remind me never to complain about 'liberal media bias' again. Right now, liberal media bias is conspiring to assist the Democrats to sleepwalk over the cliff."

But 10 minutes after the polls had closed, the Dems and the media were once again rocketing off to Planet Bananas. Before Election Day, the official line was that the recall was part of a pattern of hardline Republican subversion of the democratic process, going back through the Florida recount to the Clinton impeachment. In an about-turn so fast poor old DNC honcho Terry McAuliffe must have gotten whiplash, the new line was that the recall reflected a voter anger against incumbents that would spell disaster for Bush next year. And even as I lay on the floor howling with laughter, up there on CNN Judy Woodruff & Co. were taking it seriously. That would be the Judy Woodruff who, like 1970s serial killer Lendell Hunter, is a native of Augusta, Ga.

Just in case any Democrats have come back down to Planet Earth, here's what happened on Tuesday: The two Republican candidates -- Schwarzenegger and Tom McClintock -- pulled 62 percent of the vote between them; the Democrat, Cruz Bustamante, got 31.7 percent. The remaining 6 percent was divided among the other 132 candidates. Just to recap: Republicans 62 percent, Democrats 31.7 percent -- in the most liberal state in the nation. As long as all those angry voters keep expressing their anger by voting for Republicans over Democrats by two to one, I think I can live with it.

At Thursday's Democratic Presidential debate, Jeff Greenfield asked the candidates why it was that only 34 percent of Americans identified themselves as Democrats -- the lowest number since before the New Deal. "You're looking at the glass as half-empty, I look at it as half-full," said former House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, demonstrating the command of basic math that has made the federal budget what it is. The Democratic glass isn't half-empty, it's two-thirds empty.
Let us take the Davis/Bustamante campaigns at face value: The Republicans said it was all about business and taxes and growth; the Dems said it was about whether Arnie was a Nazi sex fiend. OK, let's take that as seriously as Katie Couric and the rest of the gang did. Every day I get a gazillion e-mails screaming "BUSH IS A NAZI!!!!" Also Cheney, Rumsfeld, even yours truly: We're all Nazis. In California, an accident of birth gave the Democrats the opportunity to run with the Nazi hysteria literally. It flopped spectacularly.

As in 2002, they tried to motivate their base by linking the recall to the Florida recount. It flopped, again.

As in 2002, they flew in Bill Clinton to whip up the crowd, at least until the groping stories started. He flopped, again -- as he did two years ago when Democratic gubernatorial candidates in Florida and Maryland were holding their own until the Big He turned up to rally the crowd.

As always, they did the big ethnic pander, damning Republican views on illegal immigration as "racist." Amazingly, even this flopped. The Hispanic vote declined to fall in line behind one of their own, and over 30 percent went for Arnie.

Nazi! Racist! Don't forget Florida! Here's Bill Clinton! It's not much of a message, is it? And, if the party's short of ideas, it's even shorter of stars. The fact that in the most populous state in the nation the two leading Democrats are Gray Davis and Cruz Bustamante is as telling as anything. The gubernatorial pool is where you look for presidential talent, and right now their only star governor is Jennifer Granholm, who can't run for president because she was born in British Columbia. That's why in Thursday's debate half the presidential candidates are sad-sack senators dulled by decades of deal-making and Beltwayspeak and the other half are goofs and oddballs. The shortage of talent is so severe they've had to parachute in Wesley Clark, a man who was playing Republican fund-raisers and waving pompons for Bush and Cheney the day before yesterday. Gen. Clark's star power seemed to have dimmed to a 30-watt bulb by Thursday. The Clark "bandwagon" is like those Gray Davis "tightening" numbers. Do you really think he'll make it through to New Hampshire?

Oh, well. If I were a Dem, I'd go with Howard Dean. Even if he loses, he'll de-Clintonize the party along the way, which ought to be the most important priority. Otherwise, it's all down to Sen. Rodham Clinton in 2008 -- or, as Paul Maslin would put it, the triumph of the Hill.