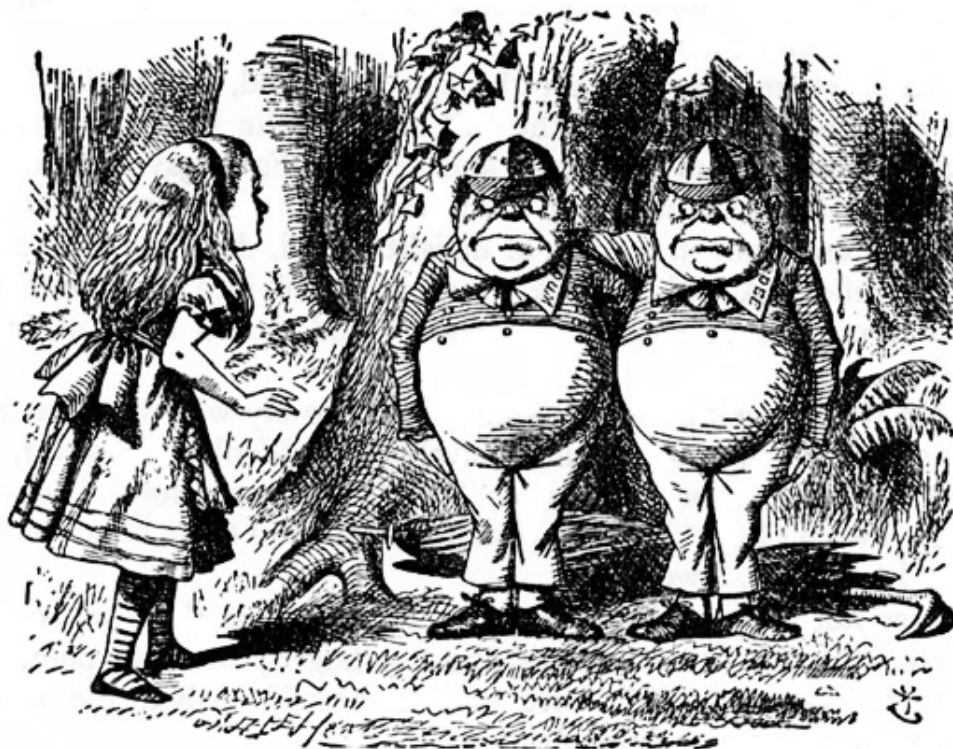


The Democratic Party and
**The Politics of
Lesser Evilism**

An ISO Web Book
by Lance Selfa

with an additional essay by Sherry Wolf



"I know they're talking nonsense," Alice thought to herself

International Socialist Organization
September 2004

\$5

The Democratic Party and
**The Politics of
Lesser Evilism**

By LANCE SELFA

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Introduction: Election 2004

Two Candidates, One Agenda

BY ALL RIGHTS, George W. Bush's resume as president has earned him a return trip to his converted pig farm in Crawford, Texas. In the post-9/11 media mythmaking that morphed Bush into a composite of Lincoln and Caesar, it was easy to forget that he actually lost the 2000 election. Or that his program, stripped of its wrapping in the "war on terrorism," has never been popular. Or that his swaggering style has produced not simply opposition, but revulsion and rage against him among millions of Americans.

Three months before the November election, it appears that chickens are coming home to roost. At the time of this writing, all major national surveys show Bush's current level of support to hover below 50 percent. Even more ominous for him, majorities tell pollsters that they think it's "time for someone new" in the White House in November 2004.

Even more important than the possibility of Bush's defeat in November is the fact that a majority of Americans (54 percent in Gallup surveys in June and July) told pollsters that they believed the war in Iraq was "not worth it." A near majority of Americans support an immediate withdrawal from Iraq. These facts show not only that the antiwar movement's efforts of two years ago were not in vain, but they show the potential that exists to build a movement that can actually challenge the priorities of a system that would sponsor such atrocities. Added to that is the six of ten Americans who say they would support a national health care system or the more than half of non-union workers who say they would like to be in a union, and there is a vast potential audience for politics on the Left.

Yet much of this potential will remain untapped, and worse, will be channeled into votes for Democratic standard-bearer John Kerry. Unfortunately, many people who could lend their

voices, insights, and organizational skills to shape the diffuse anti-Bush sentiment into a political force on the Left are instead using their talents to corral support for Kerry. For instance, many leaders of the mass antiwar movement that put more than one million demonstrators on the streets on the weekend of February 15–16, 2003, have essentially endorsed Kerry, an unabashedly pro-war candidate.¹ Meanwhile, a phalanx of well-known leftists have lent their support to the Democrats' campaign against the independent candidacy of Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo, the only ticket running against the war and calling for other progressive goals like the repeal of the USA PATRIOT Act and creation of a single-payer health care system.

Little difference on key questions

On the key questions of the day, on which, presumably, elections are supposed to be fought, there is little difference between Kerry and Bush, and not just on the question of Iraq. Kerry voted for the No Child Left Behind Act and the USA PATRIOT Act. Kerry has been a firm and unwavering supporter of "free trade" agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas. He, like Bush, opposes the right of gays and lesbians to be married. On all of these ques-

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This article was first published in International Socialist Review 37 (September–October 2004).

tions—all of which are quite fundamental—there is no difference, save perhaps a rhetorical one, between Bush and Kerry.

An aggressive campaign promising to address the economic insecurities and class inequality could actually give millions of Americans a reason to vote. But that would raise working-class expectations—which is exactly the opposite of what big business wants from the Democratic Party. That’s why the true audience for Kerry’s campaign since he locked up the Democratic nomination has been the ruling class. Knowing that a significant section of the ruling class has lost confidence in Bush, Kerry has positioned himself to offer “Plan B” to the Bush administration’s failures. Kerry has striven to portray himself as the candidate who can rescue the failed occupation of Iraq. He proposes to increase troop strength in the military. He has reassured any wavering business leaders that his blast against “Benedict Arnold corporations” is simply campaign rhetoric. For business, he proposes an orthodox budget-balancing program, supervised by the architects of Clintonomics. Before a group of big-business donors, Kerry insisted, “I’m not a redistribution Democrat...who wants to go back and make the mistakes of the Democratic Party of 20, 25 years ago.”² Kerry has been so successful in projecting this Bush-lite “centrist” image that he’s even won the enthusiastic support of the conservative Democratic Leadership Council. “Democrats are on the cusp of becoming a majority party today” write Al From and Bruce Reed, “because New Democrats like Bill Clinton and John Kerry rescued the party in the 1990s.”³

Indications are that Kerry’s Plan B strategy is working. He has managed to raised a staggering \$187 million, and a growing roster of business leaders have announced support for the wealthy senator from Massachusetts—former Chrysler chairman Lee A. Iacocca; Marshall Field of Field Corp.; Robert Haas of Levi-Strauss, Silicon Valley figures like Marc Andreessen, Jim Clark, and Charles M. Geschke; Charles K. Gifford of Bank of America; AT&T Broadband President Leo Hindery, Jr.; Sherry Lansing of Paramount Pictures; and even Peter Chernin, chairman of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp., the owner of the rabidly right-wing Fox News.⁴

Nevertheless, many on the Left are still willing to give some credence to the notion that the differences between the Democrats and Republicans, however minimal they are, justify at least a nose-holding vote for Kerry, if only in a “swing” state. Noam Chomsky, the radical critic of American imperialism who has always stressed its bipartisan nature, told a British *Guardian* interviewer:

Kerry is sometimes described as Bush-lite, which is not inaccurate, and in general the political spectrum is pretty narrow in the United States, and elections are mostly bought, as the population knows.

But despite the limited differences both domestically and internationally, there are differences. And in this system of immense power, small differences can translate into large outcomes.⁵

So Chomsky’s advice appears to be “vote for Bush-lite.” Chomsky has since endorsed a vote for Ralph Nader in “safe states” (ones where a vote for Nader won’t have any impact on whether Kerry or Bush will win that state’s electoral votes). But as Chomsky has spent his career showing, the policies flowing from the national security state don’t depend on votes in swing or safe states. They flow from a bipartisan, ruling-class consensus. A vote for Kerry means rejecting one wing of the imperialist establishment for another—a choice that is no choice at all. For the Iraqi civilians or the Colombian peasants who will bear the brunt of U.S. imperialism’s assaults, it makes no difference whether a Republican or Democratic administration is ordering the bombing of their villages or the arming of death squads.

Unfortunately, the notion that there is something uniquely awful about the Bush administration has caused many dedicated antiwar and anti-imperialist fighters to line up with Kerry—either openly, or by default. In an August 6 WBAI-New York radio interview, British antiwar activist and socialist Tariq Ali told Doug Henwood,

Had Gore been elected, he would have gone to war in Afghanistan, but I doubt he would have gone to war in Iraq. This is very much a neocon agenda, dominated by the need to get the oil and appease the Israelis. This war in Iraq is very much something this administration went for. The defeat of this administration would be a defeat of the war party.⁶

The problem with claims like Tariq’s is that there’s no way to verify them. We don’t know what the future holds, so we can’t say whether Kerry will take the U.S. into a new war. After all, Lyndon B. Johnson campaigned as a peace candidate against the warmonger Barry Goldwater, and won in a landslide. Yet LBJ escalated the war in Vietnam.

We do know that Kerry and Edwards voted for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We know that both of them advocated “regime change” in Iraq long before Bush signed on to the project. And now we know that Kerry would have voted for the war even knowing that the justifications Bush gave for it—that Iraq was stockpiling “weapons of mass destruction”—were bogus. Responding to a Bush dare to state whether he would have voted for the 2002 war resolution, “knowing what we know now,” Kerry said: “Yes, I would have voted for the authority. I believe it was the right authority for a president to have.”⁷ The Democratic platform that Kerry’s operatives largely wrote criticizes the Bush administration because it “did not send sufficient forces to accomplish the mission” in Iraq. It asserts, “With John Kerry as commander-in-chief, we will never wait for a green light from abroad when our safety is at stake.” In other words, Kerry is not going to give up his right to “unilaterally” order U.S. troops around the world. It also hints that Iran may find itself on the short end of another U.S. invasion: “a nuclear-armed Iran is an unacceptable risk to us and our allies.”⁸ Kerry has even proposed a more aggressive stance against Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez than

Bush has.

While it's generally true that party platforms aren't worth the paper they're printed on, it's hard to avoid the message that the Democrats were sending with the parade of ex-generals and the browbeating of antiwar delegates to accept a pro-war platform at their convention in July. The Democratic platform espouses the key points of the neocon agenda, without the neocon baggage. If the neocons around Bush loudly trumpet the need for a new American imperialism, Kerry and the Democrats speak for the need for "muscular internationalism." Kerry doesn't criticize Bush's decision to go to war. He simply criticizes Bush for bungling the job. This proves that his real audience is the ruling class, to which he is proposing himself as a more competent manager for U.S. imperialism. Kerry has even gotten the seal of approval from leading neocons. "When I look at the kinds of people who are advising Kerry, assuming Kerry runs his foreign policy from center and right of the Democratic Party, it would be very compatible with the Bush administration,"⁹ Johns Hopkins University's Elliott Cohen, one of the neocons' ideologues, told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Yet delegates at the Democratic convention nominated him despite the fact that a *Boston Globe* survey showed that 90 percent of them opposed the war in Iraq.¹⁰

Anti-imperialists like Tariq Ali and Noam Chomsky know this very well. In his recent *Bush in Babylon* book, Ali quotes as an example of the support for unilateral intervention in Washington a Blairite ideologue who notes, "A Bismarckian revolution is underway in international relations and it was launched not by George W., but by Bill Clinton when he decided to intervene in the Balkans."¹¹ Certainly Ali and Chomsky will oppose imperial adventures led by a President Kerry as vigorously as they oppose those of Bush. But isn't that also a good reason for them not to cut Kerry any slack today?

The unreality of the "realists"

Global Exchange and Code Pink founder Medea Benjamin has another motivation for a vote for Kerry:

This election is a referendum on the Bush administration. The world is watching and waiting with bated breath to see if the U.S. people will reject the Bush agenda. When I was last in Iraq, Ghazwan Al-Mukhtar, an Iraqi engineer, said, "Saddam Hussein was a bastard, but this was not a democracy and we didn't elect him. So his evil deeds were not done in our name. Can you say the same thing for George Bush?" We owe it to ourselves and to the global community to make sure that Bush is no longer allowed to speak in our name.¹²

This would be a compelling argument if the national elections were set up to fire the president alone. Unfortunately, as Benjamin herself knows, the only way to accomplish this is to elect Kerry-Edwards. In "An Open Letter to Progressives," Benjamin, Peter Coyote, Daniel Ellsberg, and other prominent figures made just that case: "The only candidate who can win instead of Bush in November is John Kerry," and urged a vote for Kerry in swing states.

But a sense of reality among the "realists" urging a

vote for Kerry seems lacking. This is most obvious among those Left critics who make all the arguments against Kerry before turning around and endorsing a vote for him. In his "The Lizard Strategy," circulated on the Portside Left discussion listserv, Ricardo Levins Morales calls Kerry "a reactionary career politician with a history of accepting labor support while undermining our interests"; he calls for a vote for Kerry because "the most important reason for making the removal of Bush a priority has to do with our relationship to our sisters and brothers in struggle around the world." The radical writer Naomi Klein endorsed Kerry

not because he will be different but because in most key areas—Iraq, the "war on drugs," Israel/Palestine, free trade, corporate taxes—he will be just as bad. The main difference will be that as Kerry pursues these brutal policies, he will come off as intelligent, sane and blissfully dull. That's why I've joined the Anybody But Bush camp: only with a bore such as Kerry at the helm will we finally be able to put an end to the presidential pathologizing and focus on the issues again.¹³

While Morales and Klein make all the correct arguments against Kerry, their endorsement of him undercuts everything else they say.

Should Kerry be elected on a platform that calls for the continued occupation of Iraq, an increase in the number of troops deployed there, a further internationalizing of the occupation, etc., can we really say that a vote for Kerry is a vote against Bush's war policy? Kerry has openly campaigned as the candidate who can make the occupation work—which can hardly be good news for ordinary Iraqis. If the end result is the same for ordinary Iraqis, and U.S. soldiers and their families, why is it better to have John Kerry "speaking in our name" than George Bush? In fact, by Benjamin's and Morales' logic, one could argue that a democratic vote that puts Kerry, with his war program, in office (with a majority vote and without Supreme Court hijinks) could represent a "democratic" decision on the part of Americans to lord it over Iraqis. Against this, Susan Watkins provides a reality check: "On [Kerry's] present showing, a vote for him is little more than another bullet for Iraq. In this sense, the Bush revolution has succeeded; it has produced its heir."¹⁴

Even more unrealistic are the claims of *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel and Campaign for America's Future leader Robert Borosage:

A Kerry victory would mean a repudiation of the right. It would enable progressives to go from defense to offense.... There will be stark limits to what Kerry can accomplish, but the difference between facing a constant assault organized out of the White House and having an administration with no choice but to be responsive to the progressive base will transform political possibilities.¹⁵

Of course, this argument isn't specific to 2004. In fact, it resurfaces every election year. Unfortunately, this is another claim about which the evidence is thin—and getting thinner with each election year. In fact the ruling orthodoxy of the Democratic Party today—stoked by the

mandarins of the Democratic Leadership Council—is that Democratic candidates have to prove themselves by not “pandering” to the Democrats’ most loyal voting constituencies, but by doing all they can to help out the party’s big-business funders. And given the hostile treatment of the Kucinich delegates at the convention, and Kerry’s constant rhetorical appeals to the Right and center, what makes the authors think that Kerry has the slightest interest in being “responsive” to the “progressive base?”

With liberals and radicals making the case for Kerry, Kerry feels no pressure to respond to their issues. “Kerry has less of a problem on the left in the Democratic Party than any Democratic candidate in my memory, which goes back to [John F. Kennedy],” said Representative Barney Frank (D-Mass.). “The proof of that is that I am less busy this presidential campaign than other ones. I’m not being sent out to calm down the left.”¹⁶ And, in fact, all of the Democrats’ “progressive” constituencies—unions, women’s groups, gay organizations, and so on—have signed on to Kerry’s campaign with virtually no assurances from Kerry that he will do anything to advance their demands. On the contrary, abortion rights supporters have received a pledge that Kerry won’t make support for abortion rights a litmus test for the appointment of federal judges. Gay rights supporters have received assurances that Kerry opposes gay marriage. Yet in the face of Kerry’s insults to his closest supporters, leaders of progressive constituencies simply keep their mouths shut and resolve to work harder for a Kerry victory. No wonder Kerry feels no pressure.

Anyone who believes that a President Kerry will show his gratitude to those who worked for him should remember Bill Clinton’s record. Organized labor’s efforts regularly deliver around half of the Democrats’ votes in key battleground states like Michigan. Yet the Clinton administration “rewarded” labor with the NAFTA trade agreement and “welfare-to-work” programs that undercut union jobs. Meanwhile, he let a central demand of organized labor in 1992—a ban on the use of permanent striker replacements—fall to a Senate filibuster without lifting a finger.

When he was running for president in 1992, Bill Clinton promised to pass a Freedom of Choice Act that would guarantee a woman’s right to choose. After he took office, he dropped the bill. While he vetoed GOP (and Democratic) efforts to outlaw so-called partial-birth abortions, he signed into law abortion bans on federal employees, District of Columbia residents, and maintained the ban on Medicaid funding for abortion. Women’s rights groups never made Clinton pay a political price for these betrayals. Meanwhile, a concerted attack on abortion rights gathered steam at the state level, while feminist leaders refused to mobilize a counter-offensive based, in part, on their assumption that abortion was safe with a Democrat in the White House.

The balance sheet of the Clinton years does not make for happy reading. The gap between rich and poor increased almost ten-fold. The number of federal prisoners

nearly doubled. The number of gay people forced out of the military under Clinton’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy increased. The number of people lacking health insurance increased by eight million. Clinton ordered U.S. forces into combat situations more than his previous four predecessors combined. Clinton ended the federal welfare system, accomplishing something Ronald Reagan could never have done. Trade unions represented a smaller percentage of the workforce at the end of Clinton’s term than at the beginning.¹⁷ For virtually any progressive issue one could imagine, the situation worsened under Clinton. And the climate was made even worse by the fact that liberals and progressives refused to organize opposition because “their man” was in the White House. Peter Edelman, a liberal Health and Human Services official who at least had the self-respect to resign in protest against Clinton’s welfare reform, conceded that “so many of those who would have shouted their opposition from the rooftops if a Republican president had done this were boxed in by their desire to see the president re-elected and in some cases by their own votes for the bill.”¹⁸

This is a central fallacy of the progressive case for Kerry that someone like Naomi Klein makes. Far from encouraging the growth of opposition movements, a Democratic presidency can actually retard the development of opposition. This is a particular danger for the antiwar movement. As noted above, Clinton dispatched troops around the world more than any of his immediate predecessors. Yet antiwar opposition to these adventures was virtually nil during the Clinton years. One key reason for this was Clinton’s proven ability to sell U.S. military intervention with the liberal claptrap of “humanitarian intervention.” Perry Anderson reminds us that:

Where the rhetoric of the Clinton regime spoke of the cause of international justice and the construction of a democratic peace, the Bush administration has hoist the banner of the war on terrorism.... The immediate political yield of each has also differed. The new and sharper line from Washington has gone down badly in Europe, where human-rights discourse was and is especially prized. Here the earlier line was clearly superior as a hegemonic idiom.¹⁹

The Clintonite rhetoric played not only in Europe, but in the U.S. as well, where opposition was minimal and difficult to build. Perhaps no greater testament to that fact was the liberal support that General Wesley Clark, the man who prosecuted the 1999 Kosovo war, received when he ran for president—including a high profile endorsement from filmmaker Michael Moore. If the Pentagon believes that its imperial adventures require a military draft, John Kerry will be better at selling it than George Bush. If the “war hero” claims a draft will be “fairer” to working-class and minority youth, liberals will nod their heads.

Even before the election, it’s clear what toll support for the “lesser evil” has taken on the Left. Gay leaders and Democrats have sabotaged the promising campaign of civil disobedience for equal marriage that erupted in early 2004 because they worry it will cost Kerry votes.

The antiwar movement is weaker and less visible today despite the fact that more Americans support its positions than ever. Democrats and forces sympathetic to them hijacked the June 2004 Boston Social Forum, turning much of it into a pro-Kerry pep rally and preventing representatives from the only presidential campaign that actually agrees with the Social Forum's anti-neoliberal principles—the Nader/Camejo independent campaign—from speaking at the event.²⁰ The effect of all of this is to further marginalize the Left, and to allow the general political climate to continue its slide to the right. Bush pulls U.S. politics to the right, Kerry follows, and the Left trails after Kerry. That is the unintended consequence of left-wing support for the lesser evil.²¹

The Left's self-inflicted wound

The “Anybody But Bush” sentiment that propelled the “electable” Kerry to the head of the Democratic pack and has pulled so many Left and liberal supporters into the Democrats' orbit has also undermined the only potentially positive development in the 2004 elections: the independent campaign of Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo on an antiwar, and pro-working class platform.

The surprising showing of support for Ralph Nader's independent run for president in various opinion polls—with millions indicating that they might consider a vote for Nader—is a sign that the potential exists to organize a minority who are fed up with the inability of the two-party system to provide answers to the most pressing questions today. But the Democrats and the Anybody But Bush Left have worked on parallel tracks to make sure that potential won't be realized.

For more than a year before Nader announced his intention to run in February 2004, publications like *The Nation* and prominent liberals and radicals called for Nader not to run in 2004. After he announced his candidacy, they subjected him to a campaign of abuse intended to demoralize him and his potential supporters. Democratic Party organizations—who, it will be recalled, did virtually nothing to protest Bush's theft of the 2000 election—have devoted tremendous resources to challenging his appearance on ballots across the country. And unlike the Left that says it's alright to vote for Nader in Democratic strongholds like Massachusetts, Illinois, and California, the Democratic Party in each of these states challenged (and may succeed in denying) Nader ballot access.

One should expect this kind of behavior from the sleazy politicians who run the Democratic Party, but significant organizations and individuals on the Left have also participated in the campaign to undermine Nader. The worst example of this was the successful campaign by no-name lawyer David Cobb to win the Green Party's nomination on the explicit promise of running a “safe-state” campaign. Some on the Left even provided Cobb with a pseudo left-wing justification for choosing Cobb over Nader. Writing in *New Politics* before the Greens nominated Cobb, Stephen Shalom, wrote

The case for backing David Cobb...seems to me much

more compelling than for backing Nader. Cobb is really part of the Green Party, which is a real organization, going through a democratic process—not very efficiently, to be sure, but democratic nonetheless. Look at the Green Party website, www.gp.org/, and see such links as United for Peace and Justice, ZNet, Democracy Now, and Fair Trade Coffee. This is our party.

Hence, a vote for Cobb—who is committed to campaigning in safe states—is a way to build the Left without “giving undo aid to Bush.”²²

This argument for voting Green would only carry weight if the purpose of Cobb's candidacy was to aggressively take on Bush and Kerry on the questions of the war, the occupation, the USA PATRIOT Act, abortion rights, national health care, and any of a number of other positions on which the Greens have positions to the left of the Democrats. Yet by carrying out a safe-state strategy—illustrated most absurdly when Maine native and Cobb running-mate Pat LaMarche said in an interview that she would vote against herself if the election looked close in Maine—the Green ticket has declared its own irrelevance to the national debate. You can't “build the left” if you don't want your ideas to have any consequence in the real world.

The Green Party's suicide and, more broadly, the Left's failure to offer an alternative to the two-party charade, will have impacts beyond November 2004. The Green Party, having now accepted the principle that it shouldn't compete against Democrats if it could produce a Republican victory, have rejected its own *raison d'être*. Having taken a dive in 2004, what's to stop them from doing the same in 2008 when, say, Jeb Bush might be in a position to win the presidency? If activists dedicated to building an alternative to the Democrats don't succeed in regaining control of the Greens, the Green Party will go the way of organizations like the Labor Party or the Working Families Party of New York. It will become simply a pressure group on the Democrats—the tail wagged by the Democratic donkey.

In contrast, the Nader-Camejo campaign is attempting to offer an alternative on the Left for people who want to vote against the war and occupation, against the USA PATRIOT Act, and for gay marriage and national health care. Despite these long odds, Nader-Camejo's campaign will offer the only focus in the 2004 elections for the millions who oppose the Iraq war and who want to see some positive change for working people in the U.S. Yet the full-court press by Democrats and the vicious baiting campaign against them may end up pushing their campaign to the margins, with a good possibility that it will appear on fewer ballots than Nader's Green ticket appeared in 2000. What's more, it may compel Nader to accept ballot lines from the right-wing Reform Party—which will also hand ammunition to opportunistic liberals who will use it to further disparage Nader.

Whatever happens to the Greens, the Left more broadly has suffered a setback because so many of its leaders and intellectuals—in the antiwar movement, the labor movement, the women's movement, and so on—

have caved into a pro-war, pro-business party. When movements fall behind Democrats like Kerry, they are weakened. It makes them get used to lowering their sights, putting their issues on the back burner, and not being “too aggressive.” What does it say to the millions of people who are questioning the war if antiwar activists tell them they should vote for a pro-war candidate?

It could undermine their own doubts about the war, and in that way, undermine the potential to build opposition to the war.

For a Left that constantly berates itself about being irrelevant to the concerns of ordinary Americans, the collapse behind Kerry will only confirm that irrelevance.

What the future holds

At the time of writing, early August 2004, the election is still too close to call. But whatever the outcome of the November election, it will not change the main tasks that will confront the U.S. Left.

Many on the Left who have jumped on Kerry’s bandwagon think (or hope) that Kerry’s election will move U.S. politics in a positive direction. But unless one is willing to restrict the definition of positive movement simply to evicting Bush from the White House, very little will change even if Kerry is elected. For a brief moment during the Democratic convention, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Andrew Stern allowed himself to be caught speaking the truth when the *Washington Post* quoted him as saying that a Bush re-election might deliver the shock that a labor movement in “deep crisis,” might need. He complained about the Democrats, which he described as a “hollow party” that refuses to do anything about the low-wage, non-union “Wal-Mart economy.”²³ Although he subsequently retracted the statement and will prove his commitment to Kerry by devoting \$65 million of SEIU members’ money and two thousand organizers to get out the vote for the Democrats, Stern was at least onto something.

In his campaign speeches, independent vice presidential candidate Peter Camejo says the Anybody But Bush Left confuses opposing an individual (Bush) with opposing his program (“Bushism”). He’s right. Therefore, we cannot sell short the idea of what needs to be done to turn politics around: what will be needed to actually defend our rights and win the kind of reforms we want. If unions took seriously their talk about organizing Wal-Mart workers (and not waste millions on Democrats), they would begin to address the Wal-Mart economy that Stern talks about. Building an antiwar movement that understands the necessity of working in solidarity with the Iraqi resistance to the colonial occupation of their country will shift U.S. politics far more than an election between two pro-war candidates.

If the November election manages to re-elect Bush, the Left will confront in Kerry a president committed to the free-market economy, the war in Iraq, and the “war on terrorism.” That is because those policies—and many more that could be listed—are bipartisan policies of the U.S. ruling class in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Challenging those priorities demands a class and political struggle that starts with the realization that the Democrats are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

- 1 See, for example, “Bush Can Be Stopped,” endorsed by, among others, Leslie Cagan, leader of United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) at http://www.cc-ds.org/statements1/bush_can_be_stopped.htm, or “An Open Letter to Progressives: Vote Kerry and Cobb,” whose chief signatory is Medea Benjamin, a leader of UFPJ, Global Exchange, and the Code Pink women’s antiwar organization at <http://www.commondreams.org/views04/0723-09.htm>.
- 2 For this quote and much more documentation about Kerry’s Bush-lite campaign, see Elizabeth Schulte, “The Me-Too Candidate,” *International Socialist Review* 36 (July–August, 2004): 16–21.
- 3 Al From and Bruce Reed, “The Comeback Party,” *Blueprint*, July 26, 2004, available online at <http://www.ndol.org/print.cfm?contentid=252775>.
- 4 See the full list of the two hundred business leaders—including many ex-Clintonites cashing in on their government jobs in the private sector—at the official Kerry-Edwards Web log available at <http://blog.johnkerry.com/blog/archives/002330.html>.
- 5 Matthew Tempest, “Chomsky Backs ‘Bush-lite’ Kerry,” *Guardian*, March 20, 2004.
- 6 The audio for this broadcast is available online at <http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Radio.html>.
- 7 Kerry quoted in “Bush Touts Plan for ‘Ownership Society,’” *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 2004.
- 8 For more on the Democrats’ platform, see Stephen Zunes’ analysis, “Democratic Party Platform Shows Shift to the Right on Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, August 5, 2004, available online at <http://www.fpif.org/commentary/2004/0408shift.html>.
- 9 Robert Collier, “Kerry, Bush not far apart on foreign policy,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 25, 2004.
- 10 Peter S. Cannellos, “Stance on War Splits Democrats,” *Boston Globe*, July 27, 2004.
- 11 Tariq Ali, *Bush in Babylon: The Recolonisation of Iraq* (New York: Verso, 2004), 197.
- 12 “An Open Letter to Progressives.”
- 13 See Ricardo Levins Morales, “The Lizard Strategy,” July 4, 2004, available online at <http://people-link5.inch.com/pipermail/portside/Week-of-Mon-20040705/006172.html> and Naomi Klein, “Anybody but Bush—And then Let’s Get Back to Work,” *Guardian*, July 30, 2004.
- 14 Susan Watkins, “Vichy on the Tigris,” *New Left Review* 28, July–August 2004, 16.
- 15 Katrina vanden Heuvel and Robert L. Borosage, “Victory in 2004—and Beyond,” *Nation*, July 15, 2004, available online at <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20040802&s=kvhborosage>.
- 16 Barney Frank quoted in Adam Nagourney, “Why the Democrats’ Left Wing is Muted,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2004.
- 17 For more details on this balance sheet, see Lance Selfa, “The Price of Lesser Evilism,” *International Socialist Review* 13 (August–September 2000).
- 18 Peter Edelman, “The Worst Thing Bill Clinton has Done,” *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1997.
- 19 Perry Anderson, “Force and Consent,” *New Left Review* 17, September–October 2002, available online at <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25101.shtml>.
- 20 On the Boston Social Forum, see Annie Zirin, “Boston Social Forum: Declaration of Dependence,” *International Socialist Review* 37 (September–October 2004): 7–8.
- 21 Although sinking independent movements may be an unintended consequence for the Left, it’s a deliberate strategy on the part of the Democrats, who perform a role of preventing an independent challenge from the Left to the two-party stranglehold.
- 22 Stephen R. Shalom, “In Defense of Tactical Voting (Sometimes)” *New Politics* 37 (Summer 2004), available online at <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=33&ItemID=5737>.
- 23 David S. Broder, “SEIU chief says that Democrats lack fresh ideas,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 2004.

1 “The World’s Second- Most Enthusiastic Capitalist Party”

The Democratic Party:
Myth and Reality

A Bosses’ Party

The Democrats and War:
Not a Lesser Evil

by SHERRY WOLF

The Democratic Party

Myth and Reality

“Part of the reason that the U.S. ‘survival of the fittest’ periods of economic restructuring are so relentless rests on the performance of the Democrats as history’s second-most enthusiastic capitalist party. They do not interfere much with capitalism’s momentum, but wait for the excesses and the inevitable populist reaction.”

—Kevin Phillips, *The Politics of Rich and Poor*, 1990

THE DEMOCRATS’ REPUTATION as “the party of the people” follows largely from the party’s “Golden Age,” the New Deal period (1933–1945) in which a number of important social reforms were passed. The mythic quality of President Franklin Roosevelt’s program, remembered for its public works employment and Social Security programs during the Great Depression, contributes to the image. The 1960s “Great Society,” under which Democratic administrations inaugurated Medicare and the “War on Poverty,” solidified the identification of the Democratic Party with reform.

Despite these perceptions, the reality of the Democratic Party is quite different. One has only to review the party’s history to see that the Democratic Party “traditions” that Democratic candidates pledge to defend really are not particularly progressive. It’s true that Democratic governments have helped to create some social welfare programs, but so have Republican governments. These reforms have paralleled (and lagged behind) similar moves in all developed capitalist countries. In the period of economic boom following the Second World War, all capitalist countries, regardless of governmental party, increased spending for education and employment security—programs considered necessary to boost the productivity of labor. In addition, social reforms were passed in response to demands of working-class struggle from below.¹

The Democratic Party’s effectiveness in containing these demands helps to explain its resilience over the past 50 years. If today’s labor, women’s rights, and civil rights activists look to the Democrats, it is because the Democrats have succeeded in “coopting” much of the leadership of those particular struggles. To the extent that it

has succeeded, the Democratic Party has been able to channel the radical energies of mass social movements into Democratic electoral campaigns.

The origin of the modern Democratic Party

The U.S. Civil War of 1861–1865 forged the shape of modern American politics. Before the Civil War, the Republicans welded together the Northern industrial capitalist class in an alliance with native-born farmers and some workers on the slogan of “free Soil, free labor.” The Democrats, on the other hand, represented the forces in the American economy that stood for development based on agricultural exports. Thus, it depended heavily on the Southern slave-holding planters—the backbone of the Confederacy—who opposed the protective tariffs that Northern industrialists sought.²

The war’s outcome established the dominance of industrial capital over the entire country—eliminating the major obstacle to its expansion, the Southern slavocracy, and opening the road to a modern capitalist economy. It also established the predominance of the two major government

parties, the Republicans and Democrats, and cemented the coalitions that backed them.

The rollback of post-Civil War Reconstruction in the 1870s established the Democratic Party, the party of the planters, as the segregationist ruling class of the South. Though largely disenfranchised, Blacks who could vote supported the Republicans as the party of Lincoln who “freed the slaves.” From the 1880s and early 1900s, the working class divided its loyalties between the Republicans, Democrats, and, after 1901, the Socialist Party of America. Native-born Protestant workers tended to support the Republicans, leaving the new immigrant workers, often Catholics from Ireland, Italy or Poland, to the Democratic urban political machines which consolidated in Northern cities at the turn of the century. As Mike Davis explains:

The ensuing split in the U.S. working class lasted until the eve of the New Deal, with consequences that were inimical to the development of class consciousness. Native Protestant workers rallied to the leadership of their Protestant bosses and exploiters while Catholic immigrants forged an unholy alliance with Southern reaction.⁵

Crucially, both major parties involved alliances between different segments of the capitalist class and different sections of the working class. In these alliances, the capitalist interests—which supplied money, candidates, and expertise to the parties were in command, with the working class expected to play the passive role as voters.

The major bloc which controlled the Democratic Party’s policy decisions remained the remnants of the Confederacy, Southern business interests. Until 1936, the party’s “two-thirds” rule guaranteed that these reactionary Jim Crow forces held virtual veto power over the party’s presidential nominee. And the Democrats’ monopoly of Southern state and congressional representation meant that Southern Democrats formed a persistent conservative bloc in Congress and in the Supreme Court.

The New Deal

The New Deal changed this. It was no blueprint for a full-blown welfare state, but a recipe to save capitalism in crisis. Yet the story of the New Deal and the incorporation of the new industrial unions’ leadership into the Democratic Party in the 1930s goes a long way to explaining why the AFL-CIO today acts as one of the Democratic Party’s chief pillars.

The 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression followed a decade-long employers’ offensive against the labor movement that reduced trade union membership from 19.4 percent of the nonagricultural workforce in 1920 to 10.2 percent in 1930.⁴ The labor movement seemed dead: with no ideas and with nowhere to turn for new members. Unemployment hit one-quarter of all workers in 1932.

This crisis was Roosevelt’s cue to produce a program to save American capitalism. He enlisted the help of some of the country’s leading businessmen, like General Electric’s Gerard Swope and Walter Teagle of Standard Oil of New Jersey, who argued that crisis conditions re-

quired state intervention to control the excesses of private capitalism. The “New Deal capitalists” urged Roosevelt to adopt reforms modeled on private-sector benefit and insurance plans. In fact, Social Security, created in 1936, took as its inspiration a number of “welfare capitalism” programs that some of the country’s leading corporations established in the 1920s.⁵

Despite some capitalists’ complaints that the New Deal represented a step towards “socialism,” Roosevelt and the New Dealers had no such idea. In fact, Roosevelt protested against business criticism, noting “the failure of those who have property to realize that I am the best friend the profit system ever had.” In campaign speeches in 1936, he proclaimed himself the “savior” of “the system of private profit and free enterprise.”⁶

Thus, the Depression pulled together the “New Deal” coalition. Popularly conceived as an alliance of Blacks, labor, urban dwellers, and other “popular” constituencies, behind it all was a fundamental recasting of the alignment of business forces in American politics. The New Deal coalition involved not

the millions of farmers, Blacks and poor that have preoccupied liberal commentators, nor even the masses of employed or striking workers who pressured the government from below...but something else—a new power bloc of capital-intensive industries, investment banks and internationally-oriented commercial banks.⁷

Despite the fact that the New Deal represented, in essence, a political rearrangement of American capital, it succeeded only by striking a new arrangement with the system’s traditional victims. The New Deal’s National Recovery Act’s Clause 7a, which granted the right of workers “to organize and bargain collectively,” represented part of the arrangement. While the Roosevelt administration clearly aimed to create company unions which would aid the hoped-for economic recovery, union organizers took advantage of Clause 7a to build real unions.

The 1933–34 industrial upturn brought workers back into the plants where they could feel their collective strength, a strength which gave them the confidence to fight back. By the end of the 1930s, the mass radicalization—symbolized by the 1934 general strikes in Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Toledo and by the 1936–37 wave of sitdown strikes and factory occupations—had rebuilt the labor movement. For the first time, under the banner of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), American workers created industrial unions across broad sections of industry. In 1940, unions represented just under 30 percent of all U.S. workers.

A Labor Party?

This radical action won the working class many concrete gains, such as union rights and unemployment insurance. Nevertheless, the movement failed to win some important goals. First, though quite radical on the industrial front, the labor movement, unlike other industrial countries’ labor movements, did not develop its own political party. Second, it failed to organize large sections of the Southern and Western U.S., which were preserved

as conservative, anti-union strongholds. Both of these shortcomings had damaging, long-term impacts on the labor movement. And both of them are directly attributable to the union leadership's failure to break with the Democratic Party.

Between 1933 and 1938, pressure mounted in the labor movement for the creation of labor's own party: a party which would once and for all put an end to the collaboration of unions with the bosses in the Democratic Party. Partly, these demands reflected a newly confident working class's desire to fight on its own. Partly, they reflected a response to the strikebreaking tactics that unionists had faced under even the most liberal, pro-New Deal Democratic Party state and local governments. In 1935 alone, 20 states' militias, the majority of them called up under Democratic governors, were turned against strikers in 73 disputes.⁸

By supporting the creation of Social Security and of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, Roosevelt shrewdly laid the groundwork for capturing the labor movement for the Democrats. CIO leaders John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman, seeing the possibilities for their own roles as "labor statesmen" for the Democratic administration, urged the CIO to support Roosevelt in the 1936 election. In 1936, the CIO created Labor's Non Partisan League (LNPL), which worked to provide FDR with money and votes for the 1936 election. But to be able to win CIO approval for supporting FDR, CIO leaders had to squelch pro-labor party sentiment among CIO members.

There is no question that the creation of a mass labor or social democratic party would have marked a great step forward for the American working class—to political action independent of the capitalist parties.⁹ Several state-level labor federations experimented with support for "farmer-labor" parties in this period. And 21 percent of those questioned in a 1937 Gallup poll agreed that a labor party should be formed.¹⁰ Needless to say, pro-labor-party sentiment threatened Roosevelt's plan to incorporate the labor movement into the New Deal coalition, channeling class struggle into the New Deal labor relations machinery.

The labor leaders' plans for close relations with the White House were threatened. Trotsky clearly explained why the CIO leaders would resist a move to a labor party:

Messrs. Leaders look to those above them instead of those below.... If the idea of the CIO inspired millions of workers for a certain period, the idea of an independent, militant labor party that aims to put an end to economic anarchy, unemployment and misery...the idea of such a party is capable of inspiring tens of millions.... The masses are better, more daring, more resolute than the leaders. The masses wish to struggle. Putting the brakes on the struggle are the leaders who have lagged behind the masses. Their own indecisiveness, their own conservatism, their own bourgeois prejudices are disguised by the leaders with allusions to the backwardness of the masses.¹¹

Unwilling to break from Roosevelt, the union leaders plowed the CIO's resources into his and the Democrats' re-

election campaigns, solidifying the alliance between labor and the Democrats. Though there were subsequent demands for the formation of a labor party, the 1936 election and its immediate aftermath represented a watershed—a time in which a tremendous opportunity for political independence from capitalist politicians was wasted.

In forming CIO-PAC (Political Action Committee) in 1943, the CIO ratified its refusal to form a labor party. CIO-PAC functioned as one of the many competing interest groups within the Democratic Party in pledging money to Democratic candidates. One historian explained the political rationale behind CIO-PAC:

In launching the new Political Action Committee, the CIO leadership specifically rejected any 'ultraliberal party in the name of the working man.' Instead, they sought to discipline the unruly left wing by channeling its energy into a firmly controlled political action group that could function safely within the two party system."¹²

U.S. entry into the Second World War should have shattered any illusions that unions had friends in the Democratic Party. In 1943, the Democratic Congress passed the Smith-Connally Act, empowering the president to break strikes in war industries. Of the 219 Democrats who voted for the Act, 191 had received CIO-PAC support.¹³ The U.S. government several times mobilized troops to break strikes both before and during the war. Union leaders agreed to the wartime "no strike" pledge in exchange for the dues check-off system. Thus, union treasuries swelled while workers' living standards eroded.

Business unionism triumphant: The Truman Years

The U.S. emerged from the Second World War as the preeminent world power. Large sections of American business broke with the Republicans' traditional high-tariff policies to support successive Democratic governments' "free trade" policies. "Free trade" and the restructuring of the world banking system under U.S. tutelage became the pillars of the Democrats' "interventionist" foreign policy.

Wartime inflation had driven workers' living standards back to pre-war levels. Demonstrations of unemployed workers, many newly demobilized soldiers, mounted around the country in 1945 and 1946. After the war, U.S. workers erupted in a massive strike wave, exceeding the level of strikes in the 1930s.

This labor offensive won workers some gains. But the 1946–47 upsurge differed in character from the radical 1930s strikes. Rather than erupting during a depression when workers searched for radical solutions, the postwar strike wave broke out on the eve of the longest expansion in capitalism's history. Thus, many large U.S. corporations were able to undercut discontent by meeting wage demands. Second, the experience of collaboration between union leaders and bosses in the Second World War contributed to the bureaucratization of unions and to the weakening of shopfloor organization.

Nevertheless, the postwar explosion in worker militancy stretched the close relationship between union

leaders and the Democratic Party. President Harry S. Truman, a “friend of labor,” reacted to the strike wave by joining the offensive on the employers’ side, using war-time powers to break strikes. To the bosses’ dismay, pressure for an independent labor party swelled once again—a development which threatened not only Truman, but also the union leaders, who had worked hard to solidify their role in the Democratic Party.

Following the 1946 elections, in which Republicans made substantial gains, Truman cut a deal with the union leaderships, which enabled him to pull workers behind the Democrats again. In return for labor support, Truman pledged to veto the Taft-Hartley anti-union bill after it passed in 1947. Truman vetoed the bill, knowing that Congress—with conservative Democrats holding the key votes—would override his veto. Nevertheless, the trade union leadership poured millions through the CIO-PAC and the AFL’s League for Political Education into Truman’s 1948 campaign.

“Labor did it” were Truman’s first words when he heard of his close election victory. The Truman victory was heralded as a massive step forward for labor at both the AFL and CIO conventions. But Truman’s promise to repeal Taft-Hartley was soon forgotten, as was the union leaders’ promised fightback. “Labor’s friend,” Truman, used the Taft-Hartley Act 12 times in his first year in office to break strikes.¹⁴ In 1952, during the Korean War, Truman went so far as to nationalize the steel mills to break the steelworkers union. Between 1947 and 1950, the union leaders and Truman worked closely to weed socialists, communists, and other dissidents out of the unions.

The defeat of Operation Dixie

One important outcome of the Truman years’ CIO commitment to anti-communism and to the Democratic Party was the defeat of Operation Dixie, launched in 1946 as a major effort to organize the Deep South. Initially launched with 400 organizers and a \$1 million budget, “Operation Dixie” was cancelled two years later following pressure from racist, anti-communist Dixiecrat governments and employers. The CIO leaders had to choose between organizing the South and maintaining the labor-Democratic alliance. Art Preis explained their dilemma:

It was impossible to support the Democratic Party and not reinforce its Southern wing, the chief prop of the Jim Crow system and the one-party dictatorship in the South. The CIO leaders refused to wage political war against the Southern ruling class because that would undermine the whole Democratic Party and put an end to the Democratic Party-labor coalition.¹⁵

Present-day company threats to move to the Sunbelt if workers do not accept concessions and the generally lower wages of workers in the South are the living legacy of this decision. A weakened labor movement was the result.

The events in the immediate postwar era—the short-circuiting of the militant postwar struggles, the purging of the unions of radicals, the suppression of the move for a labor party, and the consolidation of the union

leadership behind the Democrats—are the roots of the crisis in the labor movement today. While union leaders came to rely more on winning acceptance in the Democratic Party for their roles as “labor statesmen,” shopfloor organization and organizing drives suffered.

In each election victory following 1948, the AFL and CIO (and after their 1955 merger, the AFL-CIO) could claim credit in providing the key organizational, financial, and electoral support for the Democrats. As one observer noted, “[T]he pattern of union participation [in Democratic elections] underwent a subtle change in which a partisan orientation to the Democratic party gradually replaced the working-class orientation of the 1930s.”¹⁶ In other words, the union leaders became more committed to the Democratic Party—identifying “labor’s agenda” with Democratic victories—than they did with the demands and needs of union members.

George Meany, the right-wing president of the AFL-CIO from 1955 to 1980, typified this attitude among the trade union officials:

Why should we worry about organizing groups of people who do not want to be organized? Frankly I used to worry about the membership, about the size of the membership. But quite a few years ago, I just stopped worrying about it, because, to me, it doesn’t make any difference. It’s the organized voice that counts—and it’s not just in legislation, it’s anyplace. The organized fellow is the fellow that counts.¹⁷

In 1952, when CIO-PAC evaluated its own progress, it concluded that it had won none of the pro-labor policies it had pressed. But rather than concluding that tying CIO-PAC to the Democratic Party was a dead end, CIO leaders decided to continue CIO-PACs role in the Democratic Party.¹⁸

As a result, the alliance between organized labor and the Democratic Party strengthened throughout the next 20 years while the coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans passed restriction after restriction on labor unions. Following the 1943 passage of the Smith-Connally Act, the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) placed a number of restrictions on union activities, including barring communists from leadership positions, outlawing sympathy strikes, and imposing “cooling-off” periods on strikes. The Communist Control Act (1950) allowed the government to remove elected union leaderships by fiat and to deny collective bargaining rights to “communist” unions. The Landrum-Griffin Act (1959) allowed union leaders to use “trusteeships” against militants and allowed the government to take over unions. It is no overstatement to say that the U.S. currently possesses the most tightly controlled union movement outside of the Eastern bloc and military dictatorships.

The Black movement of the 1960s

If most labor activists look to the Democratic Party, Blacks have become the party’s most solid voting bloc. The explanation for this is simple. The Democrats succeeded in coopting the 1960s civil rights and Black Power movements in a similar way that they captured

the labor movement for the Democratic Party. Initially, this met with resistance from the party's traditional base, the Southern racist Dixiecrats. But by the 1970s, Democratic bosses recognized that this was a small price to pay to incorporate a layer of Black politicians and Black voters into the party machine.

Several factors explained the weakening of the Dixiecrats' hold on the Democratic Party. Blacks' wartime migrations from the rural South into Northern industry and cities boosted the impact of Black votes in the Northern urban machines. And the impact of voting rights legislation made Southern Black voters a constituency to be cultivated. Most importantly, Democratic Party electoralism acted as the chief method by which the system pulled thousands of Blacks radicalized in the 1968–1974 period back into its fold.

Until 1936, Blacks had been a solidly Republican voting constituency. Only Depression-era realignment of political loyalties pushed large numbers of Black voters into the Democratic Party. Black support for the Democrats was no guarantee of Democratic support for Black demands. Civil rights leaders had to threaten a mass 1941 March on Washington to win President Roosevelt's executive order barring discrimination in the war industries.

Kennedy and King

When the mass civil rights movement erupted in the late 1950s, a new day seemed to be at hand. In the 1960 presidential campaign, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) refused to endorse either Democrat Kennedy or Republican Nixon, planning instead to demonstrate for civil rights legislation at both party conventions. However, Kennedy's telephone call to the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in a Georgia jail cell earned him a liberal, pro-civil rights reputation and the tacit endorsement of civil rights movement leaders.

Once in office, the Kennedy administration did nothing more than attempt to channel the militant movement into Democratic electoral campaigns. In the midst of the 1961 "Freedom Rides" in which civil rights workers rode buses through the South to force integration, the Kennedy administration set up, with foundation money, the Voter Education Project (VEP). Attorney General Robert Kennedy met with representatives of civil rights organizations, telling them that "in his opinion voter registration would be a far more constructive activity than freedom rides or other demonstrations."¹⁹ At the same time that the Kennedy Justice Department was unwilling to pledge full protection to the freedom riders against racist attacks, another department wing, the FBI, was conducting a slander campaign against King.

Moreover, the Kennedys hoped the VEP would divert attention from the undeniable fact that they had done nothing for civil rights in office. Having promised to eliminate housing discrimination "with the stroke of a pen," President Kennedy refused to act. Instead, he pandered to the Southern Dixiecrats who wielded influence in Congress. His administration acted only when racist attacks on movement activists, such as those organized

by Birmingham, Alabama Police Commissioner Bull Connor in May–June 1963, threatened "law and order." Moreover, Kennedy responded to movement pressure, which, fed up with his temporizing, called a mass March on Washington in August 1963.

Following Kennedy's endorsement of the Civil Rights Act in June 1963, the administration worked side-by-side with march organizers to assure that march speakers would not criticize the administrator's footdragging. The day before the march, the administration and conservative civil rights leaders forced Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee leader John Lewis to change his prepared speech. Lewis, arriving in Washington from the South where he had faced dozens of arrests and beatings at racist Dixiecrats' hands, planned to condemn the administration's initiative as "too little, too late" and to exhort marchers to "burn Jim Crow to the ground."²⁰

Lewis bowed to the pressure, but even his watered-down speech included pointed questions: "Where is our party? Where is the party that will make it unnecessary for us to march on Washington? Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march in the streets of Birmingham?"²¹

LBJ and the MFDP

The Democratic Party was successful in many of its efforts. As the militant struggles of Black workers and students were cracking segregation in the South, the Democrats attempted to put themselves at the head of the movement—symbolized by President Lyndon Johnson's cynical use of the phrase "we shall overcome" in a speech endorsing the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, important reforms though they were, simply ratified in law what Blacks had already won in struggle.

In endorsing the two bills, LBJ was willing to countenance some disaffection among Southerners. But he was unwilling to alienate the racists in his party completely. The 1964 example of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party provides the best illustration of LBJ's duplicity

The 1960s Southern struggle for the right to vote—a fundamental democratic right which segregationist legislatures and racist violence had denied for decades—required much more than simply pulling a lever for some candidate. In many areas of the rural South, it required setting up political institutions outside the control of the Jim Crow Democratic Party that ran the Southern governments. In Mississippi, civil rights workers created their own non-segregated political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Within weeks of its founding, the MFDP signed up 60,000 voters and nominated a delegation to represent it at the national Democratic Party convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. On the grounds that it was the only freely-elected delegation in the state—the only one in which all of the state's citizens could vote—the MFDP planned a floor fight to be seated in place of the all-white Jim Crow Mississippi Democratic delegation.

But LBJ wished to avoid a floor battle that would

damage the television image of party “unity” he wanted to project. More importantly, however, LBJ feared the defection of the “white South” to his opponent, Republican Sen. Barry Goldwater. As Democratic Texas Gov. John Connally put it to Johnson: “If you seat those Black buggers, the whole South will walk out.”

Johnson turned to Democratic liberals like Minnesota Sen. Hubert Humphrey—who gave his support in exchange for a running mate’s spot with Johnson—United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther, and MFDP lawyer Joseph Rauh, to urge the MFDP to give up its demands. Humphrey’s lieutenant, then-Minnesota Attorney General Walter Mondale, won the civil rights leadership’s acceptance of a rotten compromise that allotted the MFDP two delegates—to be chosen by the convention’s Credentials Committee. With the civil rights leaders throwing their weight behind the liberals’ sellout, the Credentials Committee voted to seat the Jim Crow delegation.

The MFDP delegation voted down the compromise overwhelmingly, calling it a “back-of-the-bus” agreement. It staged a protest in the convention hall, seizing the Mississippi delegation’s seats until the Democratic leaders called on security guards and police to eject them from the convention center.²²

From Black Power to the New Black vote

The experience of facing racist violence in the South and sellouts from Democratic politicians radicalized a generation of Black activists who took up the banner of “Black Power” after 1965. Perhaps the revolutionary Malcolm X spoke first for this generation of activists. Malcolm put more clearly than other movement leaders the racist nature of the Democratic Party. “When you keep the Democrats in power,” Malcolm said in a 1964 speech to the Cleveland CORE chapter,

you’re keeping the Dixiecrats in power... A vote for a Democrat is a vote for the Dixiecrats... it’s time for you and me to become more politically mature and realize what the ballot is for; what we’re supposed to get when we cast a ballot; and that if we don’t cast a ballot, it’s going to end up in a situation where we’re going to have to cast a bullet. It’s either the ballot or a bullet.²³

Malcolm praised the MFDP activists’ courage. Nevertheless, he argued that much more radical action—a “Mau Mau,” in his words—was needed.

Thousands of Black radicals realized the need to break from the Democrats in this period, identifying their political outlook with radical groups like the Black Panther Party. But powerful forces worked against them. First, as the 1970s wore on, the postwar economic boom slowed. It crashed into recession in 1974–75. This made reforms harder to win as the government looked to cut back on spending. As the movement saw its opportunities to win concrete gains contract, its goals contracted as well. Thus, the goal of transforming society from below gave way to electoralism in the Democratic Party.

Second, as many of the 1960s movement activists looked back to the Democratic Party, an increasing core

of middle-class Black politicians arose to offer activists “concrete” and “realistic” roads to reform. These politicians, often using quite militant-sounding rhetoric, associated “Black Power” with their own electoral success. From 1967 to 1973, Black politicians gained increasing prominence with the elections of mayors Carl Stokes (Cleveland), Richard Hatcher (Gary, Indiana), Kenneth Gibson (Newark, New Jersey), Maynard Jackson (Atlanta), Coleman Young (Detroit) and Tom Bradley (Los Angeles). Many activists joined these campaigns.

The 1967 urban rebellions and the prospects of more militant activity prodded the Democratic Party machines, particularly in Northern urban centers, to make concessions to Black sentiment. Radical commentator Robert L. Allen explained in 1969 that “from the liberal point of view, some concessions must be made if future disruptions such as the 1967 riot are to be avoided.” The election of Black politicians would not change the conditions of Black people’s lives in their jurisdictions, yet “Black people were supposed to get the impression that progress was being made, that they were finally being let in the front door.... The intention is to create an impression of real movement while actual movement is too limited to be significant.”²⁴

The Democratic strategy of cooptation succeeded quite well. Not only did Black electoralism serve its purpose for the predominantly white ruling class—that of demobilizing the Black movement—but it coincided with the interests of Black middle-class politicians and their Black business backers. Between 1964 and 1986, the number of Black elected officials grew from 103 to 6,424. But at the same time, conditions for the mass of the Black population—workers and the poor—grew increasingly desperate. In fact, by the 1980s, a range of indices suggested that living conditions, job opportunities and poverty levels for Black America were worse than they were before the civil rights movement.²⁵ Often, Black electoral victories proved hollow. Assuming the reins of cities and counties facing fiscal crisis, Black Democratic politicians were able to deliver little more than austerity to their Black working-class constituents.

The Democrats and “Reaganism”

A final bit of evidence that shows the Democrats are not the “party of the working person” is their scandalous recent record—as the party in the White House and as the party in opposition to Reagan. Though individual Democratic politicians can sometimes muster militant-sounding rhetoric in criticizing Republican policies, they fall far short when it comes to backing up the rhetoric with action.

Reagan’s Democratic predecessor, Jimmy Carter, launched many of the policies that Reagan pursued with a vengeance. In 1980, in the wake of the Iranian revolution, the Nicaraguan revolution, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Carter sharply increased the military budget, reinstated registration for the military draft, and created the Rapid Deployment Force for intervention in the Middle East. During the 1979–80 “hostage crisis” in

Iran, Carter not only attempted to invade Iran, but also helped to whip up the racist anti-Iranian sentiment that bolstered Reagan's 1987–88 policy of policing the Persian Gulf. Carter also changed American nuclear weapons policy to make an American "first strike" in a "limited" nuclear war a real possibility.

The mid-1970s economic crisis shifted domestic politics decisively in a conservative direction. Responding to business complaints that social programs were "unaffordable," Carter reversed the long period of increases in spending for social welfare programs. Carter's 1978 tax plan anticipated Reaganomics by cutting capital gains taxes for the rich and by boosting Social Security taxes for the poor. It was the first time since the 1930s that Congress passed an unambiguously regressive tax plan." Carter negotiated the Chrysler "bailout" plan that opened the 1980s wave of concessionary union contracts. And in the 1977–78 miners' strike, he resorted to the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act to force a settlement.

Democrats held large majorities in both houses of Congress and held the White House. Nevertheless, the AFL-CIO's labor law reform package and a bill allowing construction workers to picket worksites were defeated. Eleven Democrats who voted for the common situs picketing bill in 1975 voted against it in 1977, providing the margin for its defeat. For their trouble, these 11 Democrats earned a total of \$169,085 in increased business contributions to their reelection campaigns—more than offsetting the \$69,167 they lost in contributions from the AFL-CIO.²⁶ This was the last time the AFL-CIO attempted a major legislative offensive.

With this record to fall back on, it should come as no surprise that the Democrats put up little resistance to Reagan's right-wing policies. When Reagan's 1981 budget cuts wiped out years of social welfare gains, it received unanimous endorsement from the Senate Budget Committee, including the votes of Democratic Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (New York), Gary Hart (Colorado) and liberals Howard Metzenbaum (Ohio) and Donald Riegle (Michigan). The 48 Democratic votes for the 1981 Reagan tax cut plan provided the margin of victory for its passage." Four years later, key Democrats—including liberal Sens. Edward Kennedy (Massachusetts) and Paul Simon (Illinois) —voted for the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings bill that imposed mandatory budget cuts.

In the realm of foreign policy, the Democrats showed themselves to be quite willing to defend "U.S. interests" overseas. Following the 1983 invasion of Grenada, Democratic leaders in Congress lined up behind the president, agreeing that the invasion was needed to eliminate a "Cuban/Soviet" base in the Caribbean. In the summer of 1985, Democratic representatives pushed and passed a renewal of aid to UNITA, the South African-backed thugs fighting to overthrow the Angolan government. One-time liberal Democratic House Armed Services Committee Chairman Les Aspin (Wisconsin) became a leading advocate of aid to the Nicaraguan contras and the Midgetman missile, which he called "the Democrats'

bomb." Democratic Reps. David McCurdy (Oklahoma) and Marvin Leath (Texas) worked to win House passage for a renewed effort to develop U.S. chemical warfare capabilities. The list could go on.

Conclusion

By any measure, the Democratic Party is a capitalist party representing the interests of the American ruling class. Major business groups "invest" in the party's candidates. Corporate money funds the party. Business-backed think tanks advise Democratic candidates and governments. For these reasons, it's understandable why the Democrats in power have behaved in no fundamental ways differently from the Republicans.

The Democratic Party has been a very resilient institution, able to incorporate significant challenges to its rule and to maintain its image as the "party of the people." Despite adaptations throughout its history, every level of the party machine depends on business interests to a much greater degree than it does on voting blocs. Because it can count on support from labor unions and from prominent leaders of civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights organizations, the Democratic Party has preserved an image of standing for reform. But at the same time, it remains as committed to capitalism as ever.

The Democrats agree with the Republicans on all fundamental questions—even if they disagree on specific policies. If Democrats argue that social programs should not be cut as deeply as the Republicans desire, they agree that such programs must be cut to demonstrate "fiscal responsibility." If Democrats campaign for slightly less regressive tax programs, they and the Republicans agree that tax breaks for the rich will stimulate investment. If they disagree on a particular use of military power, they are no less committed than the Republicans to extending U.S. influence around the world—whether against Russia or against national liberation movements. In reality, the differences that separate the Democrats and Republicans are minor in comparison to the fundamental commitments that unite them.

For the bosses, the arrangement is ideal: Two capitalist parties help to uphold their rule, one masquerading as the friend of labor and the poor. But for workers, every election presents a "Hobson's choice" between Democrats and Republicans: two alternatives, neither of them desirable.

1 Chris Harman, *Explaining the Crisis* (London: Bookmarks, 1984), pp. 104–05.

2 Peter Camejo, *Racism, Revolution, Reaction. 1861–1877* (New York: Monad Press, 1976), 23–26.

3 Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* (London: Verso, 1986), 26. By "class consciousness," Davis means "political class consciousness" that would be manifested in the creation of a stable, mass-based labor party. It should be remembered that in this period, American workers fought some of the largest and most militant mass strikes ever seen.

4 Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years* (Boston: Da Capo Press/Houghton Mifflin), 84.

5 Kim McQuaid, *Big Business and Presidential Power* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1982), 19–37.

6 Roosevelt quoted in Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years*,

- 1933-37 (New York: Random House, 1986), 372, 675.
- 7 Ferguson and Rogers, 46.
 - 8 Art Preis, *Labor's Giant Step* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), 96.
 - 9 To say that the creation of a labor party would have marked a tremendous step forward for the American working class is not the same as saying that revolutionaries should today call for a labor party or attempt to build one. Leaving aside the question of the fact that such a party would be almost assuredly a reformist party, like the British Labour Party, it is today a demand that is totally abstract given the low level of struggle and confidence in the working class. In the 1930s, when the demand for a labor party emerged from large sections of a fighting labor movement, revolutionaries would have supported that call in the broad labor movement while attempting to win workers to revolutionary organization.
 - 10 Davis, 67.
 - 11 From "Discussion with a CIO Organizer," in *Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), 68.
 - 12 Nelson Lichtenstein, quoted in Kim Moody, "Stumbling in the Dark: American Labor's Failed Response" in Mike Davis, Fred Pfeil and Michael Sprinker (eds.), *The Year Left 1* (London: Verso, 1985), 88. CIO-PAC is the forerunner of the modern-day AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education (COPE).
 - 13 Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor Peoples' Movements* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 167.
 - 14 John Anderson, *The Taft-Hartley Act*, (Seattle: Hera Press, 1977).
 - 15 Preis, 377.
 - 16 J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (New York: Vintage, 1969), 80.
 - 17 Meany quoted in Thomas Byrne Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 151.
 - 18 Davis, 93.
 - 19 August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 173.
 - 20 David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1987), 161-62. During the 1965 Selma, Alabama, voting rights campaign, Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach deliberately kept Justice Department observers away from the polls where massive fraud was reported. See Garrow, 471.
 - 21 Manning Marable, *Black American Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 95.
 - 22 Most of the information on the MFDP comes from the account in Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 167-86.
 - 23 "The Ballot or the Bullet," in George Breitman (ed.) *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 30.
 - 24 Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 139.
 - 25 Figures from Manning Marable, "Foreword," in Rod Bush (ed.) *The New Black Vote* (San Francisco: Synthesis Publications, 1984), pp. 3-5; 1987 Information Please Almanac (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), 48.
 - 26 Edsall, 135.

A Bosses' Party

WHICH CLASS AND whose class interests does the Democratic Party represent? Who finances the Democratic Party? What are its policies? What is the record of Democratic administrations? The answers to these questions form the basis of the revolutionary socialist case that the Democratic Party is a bosses' or capitalist party, which cannot be considered a "party of the people." From the point of view of the class interests that the Democrats represent, its funding sources, its record in office, the Democratic Party is just as much a party of the rich and big business as is the Republican Party.

The Democratic Party is a strange institution. Though one of the longest-existing mainstream "government" parties in the world, it doesn't really compare to other mainstream political parties on the most basic levels. It has no fixed membership or membership requirements; voters are Democrats if they vote for Democrats in elections. The party has no stated set of principles or programs. The closest approximation to a "program" is the party platform approved at the party convention every four years. Democratic Party candidates—from the presidential candidate to city council candidates—are free to follow or to ignore the party platform in their election drives.

The party platform, an amalgam of general rhetoric, attacks on the Republicans, and a laundry list of specific policy recommendations, changes with every convention—and with the political winds. The 1972 Democratic platform, written when the 1960s movements exerted influence on public opinion, would seem radical when compared with today's Democratic policy statements. The 2004 Democratic Party platform serves up platitudes that George W. Bush with would be comfortable: "Our overriding goals are the same as ever: to protect our people and our way of life; and to help build a safer, more peace-

ful, more prosperous, more democratic world. Today, we face three great challenges above all others—first, to win the global war against terror; second, to stop the spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons; and third, to promote democracy and freedom around the world, starting with a peaceful and stable Iraq."¹ Its approach to health care reform is tailored to make reform palatable to business, not to make health care a right for all: "We will help businesses cope with the skyrocketing cost of health care by reforming our health care system and cutting taxes to help small businesses pay for health insurance. Retiree health costs impose major burdens on many employers, particularly manufacturers, and we will push for reform so that companies are not forced to choose among retirees, current workers, and their own ability to compete."²

The list of platform promises of many things to many people may change. But capitalist control of the Democratic Party does not. Ruling-class interests are represented directly in the Democratic Party in three major ways: in the candidate-selection and election process, in which corporate money plays the major role; in corporate lobbying for tax breaks and other favorable treatment and in corporate influence on policy making through think tanks and other ad-

visory organizations such as the Trilateral Commission or the Committee for Economic Development.³

Candidate selection

Elections are an expensive business. Anyone hoping to mount a successful campaign needs millions. In 2002, the mean expenditure for a winning U.S. House of Representatives candidate was \$898,184, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. The like figure for a U.S. Senate race was more than \$4.8 million. The expense of electioneering means that both major parties look to wealthy individuals and to corporations for their funding. In fact, the major parties often decide to back particular candidates based on their ability to raise money.

Although labor unions send about 93 percent of their political contributions to Democratic candidates, labor union money is not decisive in Democratic fundraising. In fact, money from business trade associations and from corporate political action committees outweighs labor union funds in Democratic congressional campaigns. Figures for campaign contributions in the 2002 races for the U.S. House and Senate tell the story. Money from labor unions accounted for only 14 percent of Democratic campaign funding; money from corporations and from business accounted for 67 percent of the more than \$637 million raised from these sources.⁴ Former Sen. Russell Long (D-Louisiana), the long-time chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, was not far from the mark when he said: “It would be my guess that about 95 percent of campaign funds at the congressional level are derived from businessmen.”⁵

For business, subsidizing Democratic candidates can mean much greater access to government for special breaks and perquisites. What’s more, business funding for the Democratic Party assures that it, like the Republican Party, will remain a loyal representative of business in government. A chief Democratic financier, Richard A. Kline, executive director of the Council of Active Independent Oil & Gas Producers, explained why he helped to rally business contributions to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee for the 1986 elections: “A great danger in America is if we go the way of the British, with a labor party and a business party. And that’s what’s going to happen if the Democrats get no business money”⁶

In 1995, Steve Wynn, the CEO of Mirage Resorts, Inc.—a major gambling firm in Nevada—raised almost \$600,000 in a one-time fundraiser for Bob Dole. When Dole and the Republicans lost momentum in 1996, Wynn, a registered Democrat, decided to rekindle his ties to the Democrats. Wynn recently played a round of golf with Clinton at Wynn’s private course. The *Wall Street Journal* explained Wynn’s rationale: “[A]s every gambler knows, the surest way to bet successfully in a two-horse race is to put money on both.”

Contrary to the right-wing image of the Democrats as a party of “special interests” (read “labor unions, civil rights and womens’ rights groups”), the working class has never been “represented” in the Democratic Party.

Labor unions have never had the “clout” within the Democratic Party that business groups have had. The Democratic Party is not the political expression of the trade unions—and the trade union bureaucracy—like European labor parties are. On the contrary, the AFL-CIO generally backs whatever Democratic candidate is chosen. Thus, any money or campaigning support the AFL-CIO “delivers” to the Democrats is offered among all the other sources of money and support, predominantly corporate, that the party’s candidates receive. It is little wonder that Democratic officials have time and again ignored union demands.

Corporate lobbying

Particular sections of U.S. business have relied on the Democratic Party to push their interests in competition with other sections of U.S., business. In particular, businesses that have depended on the Democrats’ “free trade” policies overseas (some capital-intensive industries), easy credit policies (investment banks, insurance, real estate, retailers, etc.) have tended to support Democrats over Republicans. Part and parcel of this support to the party are the special favors that these sections of capital can earn from local, state, and federal Democratic governments.

Since the New Deal, large companies and whole industries have been counted in the Democratic fold. For example, until the middle 1970s, the oil, gas, and nuclear industry—in its monetary support of local and national politicians—was overwhelmingly Democratic. After the mid-1970s oil shocks, “free market pricing” and its Republican supporters became more attractive to the “oil and gas Democrats.” Some industries that depend on easier credit and spending policies—real estate, entertainment, insurance, and investment banking—remain solidly Democratic today.⁷

In the 1990s under Bill Clinton’s “New Democrats,” the Democrats shed even more of their “party of the people” image. As the party whose presidential administration presided over the 1990s economic and stock market boom, the Democrats were transformed. Although maybe a bit overdrawn, Kevin Phillips’ description of “the underlying partial transformation of the Democrats into a party of a wealthy cultural and technological elite, indeed one whose fortunes and supporting middle-class numbers in parts of the North matched those of the GOP” has a lot of truth in it. Phillips continues:

Holding office during a boom for which it got much of the credit, the Democratic Party of the ‘90s steered clear of indicting the wealth and income distributions that heyday capitalism had brought. As the first decade of the new century began to unfold with a Republican in the White House, some of those Democratic inhibitions fell away, but a substantial underlying party transformation remained.⁸

Policy advice

Once in office, Democratic (and Republican) administrations are subject to constant pressure from big business to adopt pro-business policies. Since the 1930s, the

Business Council, an advisory organization composed of the U.S.'s major corporations' chief executive officers, has acted as a sounding-board and proponent for pro-business policies within every presidential administration. All U.S. presidents have regularly consulted the Council and other organizations, like the Committee for Economic Development (CED). Democratic and Republican administrations have appointed Council and CED members to government advisory panels and to government administrative positions.

The business interests represented by such organizations as the Council, the CED, and the Trilateral Commission generally support a limited government role in the economy and an "interventionist" foreign policy. For these reasons, they coexisted quite well with Democratic administrations. Business Council influence was crucial in winning administration endorsement for a number of "Democratic" policies since the 1930s: Social Security, Marshall Plan aid to post-Second World War European governments, and the 1964-65 Kennedy/Johnson tax cut plan.⁹

Who leads? Who votes?

Democrats and Republicans are "cut from the same cloth" in another way. A comparison of national party presidential candidates since the mid-1800s shows that they tended to be lawyers and/or professional politicians. Most tended to be descended from professional families. In these characteristics, the Democratic nominees did not differ from the Republican nominees.¹⁰

What of the so-called "mass base" of the Democratic Party? When one surveys the Democratic electorate, one finds a paradox. Since the Second World War, electoral support for the Democrats among all of the core New Deal "mass" constituencies—union members, the poor, Catholics, Jews, city dwellers and farmers—has fallen consistently. These voters are less likely today to identify the Democratic Party as "their" party than they were a generation ago. Blacks are the only group whose election-day commitment to the Democrats has increased since the New Deal.¹¹ The creation, in the 1970s, of a layer of Black Democratic politicians has helped solidify Blacks' attachment to the Democratic Party.

While some of the more wealthy and middle-class voters have defected to the Republicans, most working-class and poorer voters have simply dropped out of the electorate. The simple fact is that the majority of the "people" in the "party of the people" simply stays home on election day. In the 1996 election, fewer than one half of the eligible electorate voted. In the 2000 election, just over half voted. In any event, the "party of non-voters" exceeds any tally the Democrat or Republican candidate rolls up. These non-voters tended to be Black rather than white, unemployed rather than employed, younger rather than older, working-class rather than middle-class, lesser educated rather than well-educated." Even if the Democrats were to mobilize new voters from these non-voting groups into the party, the fundamental character of the Democratic Party would not change. Such a mobilization could strengthen the party's hold on

the electorate. But it would change neither the party's fundamental commitment to capitalism nor its dependence on business money and advice.

It's indicative of the depoliticized nature of the American political system that such a large percentage of the population would not bother to vote. In a political system dominated by two capitalist parties whose candidates compete predominantly on the grounds of image rather than on program, one wonders why anyone bothers to vote.

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- 1 "Strong at Home, Respected Abroad: The Democratic Platform for America," Washington, D.C., 2004: Democratic National Committee available at www.dnc.org, 3-4.
 - 2 Ibid., 21.
 - 3 G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now?* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1983), Chapter Five.
 - 4 Center for Responsive Politics, "The Big Picture: 2002 Cycle Business-Labor-Ideology Split in PAC, Soft & Individual Donations to Candidates and Parties" available at <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/blio.asp?cycle=2002>. The Center for Responsive Politics says its method for classifying contributions may overstate business contributions. But even accepting that, a 67 percent/14 percent business/labor mix in Democratic campaign funds is such a wide gap that methodological flaws can't account for it.
 - 5 Long quoted in Ira Katznelson and Mark Kesselman, *The Politics of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1975), 259.
 - 6 Congressional Quarterly, *Elections 1986* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1986), 60.
 - 7 Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 222-27.
 - 8 Kevin Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 343.
 - 9 See Kim McQuaid, *Big Business and Presidential Power* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1982).
 - 10 Ralph M. Goldman, *The Search for Consensus: The Story of the Democratic Party* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 344-46.
 - 11 Ibid., 257-63.

The Democrats and War

Not a Lesser Evil

by SHERRY WOLF

EXPECTATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC Party opposition to a new war on Iraq were dashed in October, 2002, when 81 House Democrats and 29 Democratic senators voted *for* Bush's war resolution. Millions of Americans believe that those Democrats betrayed the core liberal values of their party. But the Democratic Party has always been committed to projecting U.S. military power abroad—every bit as much as the Republicans.

Even those liberals who did express opposition to the Bush doctrine of preemptive strike accept the right of the U.S. to intervene wherever it chooses. Senator Ted Kennedy's declaration on the floor of the Senate, "I have come here today to express my view that America should not go to war against Iraq unless and until other reasonable alternatives are exhausted," was portrayed by the media as positively dovish, even though it is a prowar position. Like Al Gore—who fears an immediate attack on Iraq would jeopardize the broader "war on terrorism"—Kennedy's disagreement is with the manner and timing of a war, not the war itself. They argue for a multilateral war that involves a coalition of forces with the consent of the United Nations (UN) Security Council after a new round of inspections of suspected Iraqi weapons sites. In short, if the war follows the script of the last Gulf War, they will support it—just as Al Gore did in 1991.

Even Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), head of the Progressive Caucus in Congress, is careful to qualify his opposition to war by writing, "*Unilateral* military action by the United States against Iraq is unjustified, unwarranted, and illegal."¹ However, the distinction between multilateral and unilateral action matters little to the 200,000 Iraqis killed by coalition bombs during the last Gulf War and the more than one million victims of UN sanctions. Moreover, in practice, most of these Democrats will collapse into the

prowar camp (announcing that we must rally around the president in a time of war) as soon as the attack starts, whether or not it has the UN rubber stamp.

Despite their reputation of being the party of the people, the Democrats have proven themselves to be as much a party of big business as the Republicans. Some of the biggest names in Corporate America—Archer Daniels Midland, ARCO Coal/Chemical, AT&T, Philip Morris, and RJR Nabisco—contributed more than \$1 million in soft money to both parties over the past 10 years. Though labor unions do tend to back the Democrats, their total donations in the 1998 election campaigns amounted to only 3 percent of all Democratic Party contributions, compared with a whopping 63 percent from businesses.² The ability and resilience of the liberal wing of the American ruling class, represented by the Democratic Party, to contain and channel working class discontent has been detailed and explained in past issues of this journal. Here, we aim to dispel the myth that they act—or have ever acted—as a real counterweight to the sometimes more overtly hawkish Republican Party.

The Democrats and the birth of American imperialism

I want to take this occasion to say that the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest. —Woodrow Wilson, 1913³

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Democratic President Woodrow Wilson's rationale for modern imperialism, in which "the flag follows commerce," contained no lofty appeals to freedom and democracy:

Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of the nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, *even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process*. Colonies must be obtained or planted, in order that no useful corner of the world may be overlooked or left unused.⁴

Wilson wrote these words just after the Spanish-American War that began in 1898, which launched the U.S. as an imperial contender. A "splendid little war"—as the New York papers dubbed it—during which Cuba became a sugar colony of the U.S., Puerto Rico began its long history as a U.S. "protectorate," and 8 million Filipinos were subjected to brutalities beginning the very day that Rudyard Kipling published his poem calling upon the U.S. to "Take up the White Man's burden."⁵

Wilson, the mild-mannered professor from Princeton who opposed women's suffrage, established a reputation for warmongering and brutality that was to become a hallmark of Democratic Party foreign policy. He intervened in more countries where he stationed troops for longer periods of time than had the previous Republican administrations of Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft combined.

Aside from dispatching troops to Europe in the waning years of the First World War, Wilson's presidency exercised "gunboat diplomacy," sending in the marines to Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Panama, the Soviet Union, Honduras, China, and Guatemala. The raid on Haiti, where U.S. troops remained for 19 years, is instructive as to the ways of Democratic methods. When National City Bank in New York insisted that the Haitian customhouses relinquish a hefty amount of the only existing reserves of Haitian capital, they refused. American troops landed at Port au Prince in December 1914 and stole \$500,000 that they then loaded onto their gunship and deposited in the vaults of National City Bank. After a series of uprisings that ended in the assassination of the Haitian president, U.S. troops launched a full-blown occupation, killed thousands who resisted, disbanded the Haitian military, trained a puppet force under direct leadership of U.S. officers, and built the infrastructure necessary to turn Haiti into the haven for cheap labor that it remains today. *The Nation* reported, "Those who protested or resisted were beaten into submission. . . . Those attempting to escape were shot."⁶

Unlike the direct colonial relationship that Britain had with India, the U.S. preferred to establish spheres of influence without having to resort to the costly practice of military occupation and direct colonial administration. The very threat of military occupation, combined with commercial agreements and loans with strict conditions attached, became the preferred method to subdue

the nations of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. The U.S. also installed and backed brutal military dictators who opened their markets for U.S. plunder, such as Anastasio Samoza of Nicaragua and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

While Britain and France plotted to steal the wealth and territory of the crumbling Ottoman Empire to the east, Germany tried to grab it up for itself instead. The conflict thrust the entire world into a mass slaughter of 25 million in 1914.

President Wilson, who ran as a peace candidate promising to keep America out of the First World War, kept his word just long enough for the U.S. to make a financial killing by supplying the Allies. The war catapulted the U.S. onto the top tier of global powers. By 1917, Wilson followed the calls for "profits or peace" from the House of Morgan and other Wall Street titans and sent tens of thousands of sons of the working class to their deaths in the muddy fields of Europe. This "war to end all wars," as it was known until the next cataclysm, left New York as the new London of banking, created 21,000 new American millionaires, and reduced the wages of working people from their prewar levels by the time the truce was declared in 1919.⁷

In the postwar era, "peace was to be a continuation of war by other means," wrote socialist historian Sidney Lens.⁸ With European powers devastated by a war that depleted their gold reserves and destroyed much of their industrial capacity, the U.S. could afford to control world markets without guns. The U.S. produced 85 percent of the world's cars, held half the world's gold reserves, and pumped two-thirds of known oil reserves. Wilson's brainchild, the League of Nations—the forerunner of the United Nations—was not the international body of collaboration for peace that historians portray. Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky explained its role this way:

Under the League of Nations flag, the United States made an attempt to extend to the other side of the ocean its experience with a federated unification of large, multinational masses—an attempt to chain to its chariot of gold the peoples of Europe and other parts of the world, and bring them under Washington's rule. In essence the League of Nations was intended to be a world monopoly corporation, "Yankee and Co."⁹

Liberals and the "good war"

I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: You boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1939¹⁰

No other American foreign intervention can compare with the noble reputation of the Second World War. Every school child learns of the battle against the essence of human evil—Adolph Hitler's fascism. Unlike all previous and subsequent wars, it is inscribed in the popular imagination as "the good war." But America's rationale for entry into battle in the "war for democracy and against fascism" in 1941 stretches the realms of credibility when one considers that fascists were in power in Italy under Mussolini since 1922, in Spain under Franco since

1936, and in Germany under Hitler since 1933. During the Second World War, 55 million people were killed—most of them civilians. For a second time, civilization was treated to the unprecedented capacity for barbarism for which modern imperialism is uniquely suited.

The global capitalist crisis, which saw a 50 percent decline in industrial production between 1928 and 1932, laid the basis for a new carve-up of markets and territory. Living in exile from Stalin's Russia, Leon Trotsky wrote:

The present war—the second imperialist war—is not an accident; it does not result from the will of this or that dictator. It was predicted long ago. It derived its origin inexorably from the contradiction of international capitalist interests...the immediate cause of the present war is the rivalry between the old wealthy empires, Great Britain and France, and belated imperialist plunderers, Germany and Italy...U.S. capitalism is up against the same problems that pushed Germany in 1914 on the path of war. The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of "organizing Europe." The United States must "organize" the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism.¹¹

After the slaughter in the trenches of Europe during the first global conflagration, American capitalists understood the need for lofty ideals as marketing tools in order to draw almost 16 million primarily working-class Americans into the armed forces. There was no one better to sell this unprecedented overseas expansion of power than Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who served as president from 1933 until his death in 1945.

The stock market crash and Great Depression that followed left one-quarter of American workers unemployed in 1932. The crisis forced FDR to create programs that would save American capitalism. Enlisting the help of the CEOs of General Electric and Standard Oil, Roosevelt developed plans to rein in the excesses of private corporations. He adopted reforms modeled on private-sector insurance plans. Though FDR is popularly believed to have been one of the greatest friends of working people in the nation, he protested this by calling himself, "the best friend the profit system ever had."¹² In 1936, he campaigned as the "savior" of "the system of private profit and free enterprise."¹³

FDR, the scion of a powerful aristocratic New York family, understood the stakes in the war were for global economic domination. If the U.S. could avoid battle for as long as possible, while supplying the Allies who fought it out on the ground, then the U.S. would walk away from the whole affair with unprecedented industrial capacity as well as territorial booty, with minimal casualties. Roosevelt put it like this in a 1940 press conference:

As you know, the British need money in this war. They own lots of things all over the world...such as tramways and electric light companies. Well, in carrying on this war, the British may have to part with the control and we, perhaps, can step in or arrange—make the financial arrangements for eventual ownership. It is a terribly interesting thing and one of the most important things for

our future trade is to study it in that light.¹⁴

Republican leaders in Congress were among the most opposed to American entry into the war. They made up the core of isolationists who preferred to profiteer from trade with the Western allies, while Germany and Russia bled each other to death. Most Republicans voted against Roosevelt's Lend-Lease Act as late as 1941 (135 against, 24 for) because it essentially allowed the president to violate international law by selling, leasing, or transferring war material to any nation he deemed worthy. Rabid anti-communism, since the victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917, echoed inside both parties and fuelled Republican resistance to aid the Soviet allies. Even Democratic Vice President Harry S. Truman suggested that "if we see that Germany is winning the war we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany, and in that way let them kill as many as possible."¹⁵

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor provided the pretext for war and clinched the domestic support that Roosevelt's administration was angling for. The day after the bombing, the publisher of the liberal, prowar *New York Times* wrote, "We did not go to war because we were attacked at Pearl Harbor. I hold rather that we were attacked at Pearl Harbor because we had gone to war." Typically, liberal publications such as *The Nation* were relieved to support war once the U.S. was attacked first—as if the U.S. conflict with Japan for the control of Asia could be justified simply based on who fired the first shot. Any notion that Roosevelt would wage war in such a way as to avoid civilian casualties should have been buried along with the hundreds of thousands of dead from carpet bombings, where between 250,000–400,000 are estimated to have perished in Dresden alone, and the firebombing of Japanese cities that produced even higher total casualties.¹⁶

Handfuls of socialists were among the very few to expose Roosevelt's hypocrisy in waging the war. Despite *New York Times* stories detailing Nazi atrocities since 1933, his administration abandoned 6 million Jews to the Nazi extermination. Not only did Roosevelt refuse to bomb the railroad tracks leading to the concentration camps—which could have saved millions from the gas chambers—but he appointed an anti-Semite, Breckinridge Long, to oversee the refugee crisis. Long prevented Jews from emigrating to the U.S. because he suspected them all of being communists or even agents for Hitler.¹⁷

Perhaps the most indefensible act of imperial slaughter was left to Roosevelt's Democratic successor, Harry Truman. When he dropped two nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945—incinerating hundreds of thousands instantly and subjecting millions more to cancer—even generals winced. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was moved to say, "Personally, I am not at all sure that we were well advised to use it." Secretary of State Stimson, a Republican, admitted, "The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender."¹⁸ But the domestic voice of liberalism, *The Nation*, wrote a hearty defense of the genocide:

From the point of view of military strategy, \$2 million (the cost of the bomb and the cost of nine days of war) was never better spent. The suffering, the wholesale slaughter it entailed, have been outweighed by its spectacular success; Allied leaders can rightly claim that the loss of life on both sides would have been many times greater if the atomic bomb had not been used and Japan had gone on fighting.¹⁹

Like empires before, the new American Empire “feasted on the corpses of the old.” It dictated terms in formerly British and French colonies of the oil-rich Middle East; controlled trade in Japan’s old stomping ground in the Pacific; and dominated the entire Western Hemisphere without challenge. Tens of billions of dollars in aid from the postwar Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe’s bombed out cities and industry tied them to the Pax Americana—U.S. global domination. Producing half the world’s rubber and steel and owning 60 percent of all manufacturing capacity, the U.S. was a behemoth without any immediate challengers. The bombing of a defeated Japan—what socialists view as the first act of the Cold War—put the Soviet Union and any other potential competitor on notice that the U.S. would go to any lengths to preserve its new-found power.

Camelot goes to war

We are not about to send American boys 9,000 or 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.

—Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964²⁰

Vietnam was the liberals’ war. John F. Kennedy came into office promoted as the dashing knight from Camelot, a figure out of the dark ages legend of King Arthur. In reality, he was the rich son of a Prohibition-era booze smuggler, “the Processed Politician,”²¹ who railed against the reds and assured southern Dixiecrats that he would never overturn antiunion right-to-work laws.²² Kennedy continued Eisenhower’s policy of sending armed “advisers” to Vietnam. That force reached 16,000 under his command, and according to the International Red Cross, they often observed or participated in the beating and torture of Vietnamese civilians.²³

Popular mythology promoted by films such as Oliver Stone’s *JFK*, presumes that had Kennedy not been assassinated in Dallas in 1963, the U.S. war in Vietnam would never have occurred. Though we’ll never know for sure, it must be noted that Kennedy did see fit to bring the planet close to nuclear annihilation in 1962 in response to Soviet missiles in Cuba. Though the USSR had had missiles with the capacity to bomb American cities for years, Kennedy, who had won the presidency by the slimmest of margins, chose to prove his own prestige and assert America’s unquestioned authority by bringing the world close to its first thermonuclear confrontation.

Millions around the world today cringe at George W. Bush’s assertion that war on Iraq is necessary to produce a “regime change,” but it is worth remembering the Bay of Pigs invasion that ended in fiasco. Kennedy gave the go-ahead to CIA operatives to land on Cuba’s beaches and remove Cuba’s popular leader, Fidel Castro, for dar-

ing to pose a threat to the U.S. by nationalizing hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. property. Though Castro offered payment in exchange, U.S. dominance had been challenged in its own hemisphere, making Castro an enemy for life. When the assault failed miserably, Kennedy was attacked in the media and by his own party for failing to use air power as cover for the insurgents.

Kennedy was far more successful in August 1963, when his administration gave a nod and supplied cash to Vietnamese generals to overthrow a hated and corrupt dictator, Ngo Dinh Diem. After Kennedy’s hopes that the U.S.-imposed “benevolent authoritarianism” of Diem could unify the country were dashed, he agreed to the coup.²⁴ The right of the U.S. government to remove another nation’s leader was never challenged in mainstream circles. He was continuing a policy that had been pursued by virtually every American president of the 20th century.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and eventually Nixon, sent 58,000 working-class men and women to die, and over a million more to suffer horrific battle in Southeast Asia to prevent Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from becoming communist. The “domino theory,” whereby countries one by one would “go over very quickly like a row of dominoes”²⁵ to the competing imperialist sphere of influence—China and the USSR—was formulated in 1954 by then-President Eisenhower. Seven million tons of bombs were dropped on these peasant nations—where as many as five million were killed and tens of millions displaced—more than twice the amount dropped on Asia and Europe during all of the Second World War.²⁶

Lyndon B. Johnson was elected in 1964 with overwhelming support from those in opposition to war in Vietnam. He ran his campaign as the “peace candidate”—promising to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam. His campaign ads portrayed his right-wing opponent, Barry Goldwater, as a man likely to bring the U.S. into a nuclear war. Fearful that Goldwater would win the election, many in the New Left Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) called for a vote for Johnson as the “lesser evil.” He won a landslide victory with 61 percent of the vote. But within months of his victory, Johnson not only sent the marines to the Dominican Republic to set up a puppet regime, but he escalated the U.S. war in Vietnam, eventually sending 550,000 troops.²⁷ Many of the same people who raised the campaign chant, “Half the way with LBJ,” later marched chanting, “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids have you killed today?” Hal Draper, a leading sixties activist and socialist summed up the lesson this way:

Who was really the Lesser Evil in 1964? The point is that it is the question which is a disaster, not the answer. In setups in which the choice is between one capitalist politician and another, the defeat comes in accepting the limitation to this choice.²⁸

More lies surround the role of Democrats in Vietnam than most other wars. The massive shift of domestic opinion against the war, the body count on both sides, and ultimately the defeat of the U.S. compelled the liberals to rewrite their own history. The majority of working-class

Americans called for immediate withdrawal of the troops, including many who became soldiers—61 percent of grade school graduates and 41 percent of the college educated were for withdrawal by 1970.²⁹ When the Vietnamese National Liberation Front took U.S. troops by surprise in the Tet offensive of 1968, it was clear that even if the Vietnamese guerrillas might not be able to win the war militarily, it would be impossible for the Americans to win. Instead of withdrawing troops and agreeing to a peace plan immediately, LBJ threw 24,000 more men onto the killing fields of Southeast Asia.

But stalemate at a high cost took its toll on Washington's will to continue the war. Though the U.S. entered the war in a time of unprecedented prosperity, the war's ceaseless escalation had damaged the economy. When European banks began to redeem dollars for U.S. Treasury gold to recoup their losses, \$372 million was lost in a day and Johnson feared a 1929-style collapse. He began to bombard Vietnam with limitless firepower from the air in a futile attempt to "conceal failure with brutal revenge."³⁰ One American general described the Vietnamese countryside in 1969: "[It] looked like the Verdun battlefields." LBJ, who came to office promising to end the conflict in Vietnam, pursued a murderous strategy in a futile effort that destroyed the region for decades to come.

Some Democrats, who had spent the previous years defending U.S. war, suddenly posed as peaceniks. Robert Kennedy had spent his early career as a young lawyer for the McCarthyite House Un-American Activities Committee. In 1961, as Attorney General in his brother's administration, he tried to quell civil rights protests and told James Farmer, the leader of the Congress on Racial Equality, "Why don't you guys quit all that shit, freedom riding and sitting-in shit, and concentrate on voter registration. If you do that I'll give you tax-free status."³¹ Perceiving an opening to reclaim the throne, Kennedy reversed his long-held support for the Vietnam War and announced himself the new peace candidate. He was assassinated on the campaign trail, Johnson withdrew from running in the midst of domestic upheaval, and Nixon won the presidency. The U.S. ruling class continued the war for four more years, gradually substituting South Vietnamese troops for Americans. Finally, in 1975, U.S. forces pulled out and the puppet regime in the South collapsed. War in that "damn little pissant country,"³² as Johnson referred to Vietnam, not only led to his political demise; it proved that even mighty U.S. imperialism could be beaten.

Peace prize imperialist

We should give President Nixon our backing and support.

—Jimmy Carter, 1973³³

Much has been made of the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize committee's choice of recipient, Jimmy Carter. A generation has grown up watching him travel the world to promote peaceful diplomacy and build homes through his Habitat for Humanity foundation. But the millionaire

peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia, with the easy smile and populist approach has a darker history as president.

Under Carter, the United States continued to support, all over the world, regimes that engaged in imprisonment of dissenters, torture, and mass murder: in the Philippines, in Iran, in Nicaragua, and in Indonesia, where the inhabitants of East Timor were being annihilated in a campaign bordering on genocide.³⁴

Most of the hundreds of thousands of deaths in East Timor took place during the Carter administration, which increased military aid to the Indonesian dictator Suharto by 80 percent. In Zaire, Carter sent the U.S. Air Force to ferry Moroccan troops to put down a popular uprising against the brutal dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. He echoed Corporate America's opposition to sanctions on the apartheid South African regime and vetoed UN Security Council resolutions that attempted to stop supplies to the racist military by U.S. companies. Carter ignored pleas from Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero to stop arms shipments and advisers to the junta there that was massacring trade unionists and human rights workers—and he continued arms transfers even after the junta brutally murdered Romero. In a move that would come back to haunt the U.S., he sent military and economic aid to strengthen the Islamic fundamentalist opposition to Soviet troops in Afghanistan.³⁵ During a state visit in 1977, Carter toasted the Shah of Iran, calling him an "enlightened monarch who enjoys his people's total confidence."³⁶ Two years later, the Shah's forces fired upon thousands of protesters at the start of the revolution that threw him out of power.

Carter is perhaps best remembered for brokering a peace deal in the Middle East that led to Israeli forces pulling back from occupied Sinai. What is forgotten is that, in exchange, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat accepted billions in funds as America's closest ally in the region after Israel. Calls for a Palestinian state were rejected, and instead Carter dramatically increased aid that went toward Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories.

The Nobel Prize committee may believe that Carter is committed to peaceful diplomacy as opposed to President Bush's warmongering, "[b]ut in 1979, Carter signed Presidential Directive 59, establishing plans for fighting a 'limited' nuclear war, including a first strike policy."³⁷ Announcing the new "Carter Doctrine" in his 1980 State of the Union address, Carter warned, "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."³⁸ In the wake of the Shah's fall, Carter was instrumental in developing the Rapid Deployment Force, capable under the new doctrine, of intervening to protect U.S. interests in the Middle East.

U.S. imperialism was seriously wounded in Vietnam—the beast had been beaten and needed to recover from domestic disillusionment and international disdain. If at times Carter pulled back from more overt military

action, it had nothing to do with his supposed pacifism. Nothing about the fundamental dynamic of economic dominance by the U.S. had been altered. American multinational corporations in the late 1970s were more active internationally than ever before, and any personal abhorrence he might have had about the killing in Vietnam never amounted to aid for that country to rebuild. The human rights reforms Carter verbally pressed for in South Africa and Latin America never threatened commercial dealings with these nations that supplied the U.S. with 100 percent of industrial diamonds, coffee, and rubber.

After Carter's election in 1976, the liberal establishment's magazine, the *New Republic*, happily reassured Corporate America, "American foreign policy in the next four years will essentially extend the philosophies developed...in the Nixon-Ford years. This is not at all a negative prospect....There should be continuity." How right they were.

A veneer of compassion

Our objectives are clear. Our forces are strong, and our cause is right.

—Bill Clinton, regarding the 1998 deployment of U.S. troops to the Persian Gulf.³⁹

No government sends troops off to war with the declared aim of profits, plunder, and conquest. But under Bill Clinton, the "I feel your pain" president, Democrats reached new heights of hypocrisy. In the post-Cold War era, Clinton sought to preserve "stability" and maintain massive military spending in order to promote expansion to markets previously closed to the West. Two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. military spending was still 85 percent of what it was during the height of the Cold War. Bill Clinton deployed U.S. troops into combat 46 times during his eight-year presidency—more than Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush combined—yet he enjoyed almost universal support for his "humanitarian" missions.

In Somalia in 1993, Clinton continued George Bush's Operation Restore Hope. Under the pretext of feeding the hungry, the U.S.-led UN deployment arrived months after those most threatened by hunger had already died of starvation. An estimated 10,000 Somalis were left dead at the hands of U.S. and UN forces, according to the *New York Times*. After 18 U.S. soldiers died in the now-famous Black Hawk Down incident, U.S. troops fled, leaving the East African nation worse off than when they arrived. This, the first of a string of "humanitarian" wars, was part of an effort to create ideological support for a reinvigorated interventionist U.S. foreign policy.

In Operation Uphold Democracy, Clinton deployed 21,000 U.S. troops in a UN mission to stop the flood of refugees arriving on Florida's shores in 1994. Jean Bertrand Aristide, a democratically elected president and charismatic Catholic priest, had been ousted in a 1990 CIA-backed coup when he attempted to grant minimal reforms that would aid the citizens of the poorest country

in the Western Hemisphere. The military junta destroyed all forms of political and social organization, and Aristide's supporters were hacked to death and tortured in the streets of Port au Prince with machetes. Clinton's compassion for the desperate refugees led him to jail them in a makeshift prison camp on Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The invasion was not so much to create democracy—in fact, the U.S. has worked since to undermine Aristide's rule—as it was to restore order in Haiti and thereby justify the return of the Haitian refugees.

In Iraq, the Clinton administration not only continued a policy of bombing in illegally maintained "no fly" zones that devastated partially rebuilt infrastructure, but also the sanctions that increased misery and the death toll. When Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (at that time Clinton's ambassador to the UN) was asked on *60 Minutes* by reporter Lesley Stahl, "We have heard that half a million children have died. I mean, that's more children than died in Hiroshima. And you know, is the price worth it?" Albright replied, "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it."⁴⁰

Clinton's approval to sell F-16s and other military equipment to Indonesia's murderous regime prompted the *Boston Globe* to write,

The arguments presented by senators solicitous of Suharto's regime—and of defense contractors, oil companies, and mining concerns doing business with Jakarta—made Americans seem a people willing to overlook genocide for the sake of commerce.⁴¹

Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic sits today in The Hague facing war crimes charges for his ethnic cleansing of Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Kosovar Albanians in a series of wars that raged through the middle of Europe in the 1990s. But the Clinton administration's role in playing nationalist leaders off of one another in a cynical power play to divide and conquer the former Yugoslavia—as well as a bombing campaign on Serbia led by U.S.-NATO forces that targeted the country's civilian infrastructure—should place Clinton alongside Milosevic in shackles. This "deliberate terror campaign," as journalist John Pilger described NATO's war, helped reduce a multiethnic society into ethnically cleansed territories dominated by nationalist warmongers under the control of NATO—itsself a tool of U.S. imperial power in Europe.⁴² NATO's 1999 war was launched ostensibly to help Kosovar-Albanian refugees, but its impact made the refugee crisis worse, and later facilitated the ethnic cleansing of the Serb population in Kosovo.

According to Michel Chussodovsky, professor of economics at the University of Ottawa, U.S. and NATO planes conducted thousands of bombing sorties against Serbia, directed not only "against industrial plants, airports, electricity, and telecommunications facilities, railways, bridges, and fuel depots, [but] also...schools, health clinics, day care centers, government buildings, churches, museums, monasteries, and historical landmarks."⁴³ According to the International Center for Peace

and Justice: “No city or town in Yugoslavia is being spared. There are untold civilian casualties. The beautiful capital city of Belgrade is in flames, and fumes from a destroyed chemical plant are making it necessary to use gas masks.”⁴⁴ U.S.-NATO forces even deliberately blew up the Belgrade TV station building in an April 1999 cruise missile attack, killing 16 people. NATO officials justified the attack on the grounds that the station was disseminating pro-government propaganda.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent implosion of the USSR in 1991, meant that Clinton was the first president to not have the “communist threat” as a rationale for war since the U.S. had achieved superpower status. But instead of distributing a multi-billion-dollar peace dividend that could have paid for universal health care and a rebuilt education system, as promised, Clinton’s policies continued the imperial priorities of the system. Though he presided over the greatest boom in the history of capitalism, very little of it went to American workers. Even Republican advisers such as Kevin Phillips are compelled to rail against the unprecedented gap between rich and poor that is the legacy of that boom. Clinton continued to funnel billions into the military and paid for it by carrying out the now infamous “welfare reform,” which gutted the country’s social safety net.

Tragically, Clinton’s foreign exploits from Somalia to the ravaging of Yugoslavia were done with enormous support from liberal politicians and publications. *The Nation* ran numerous articles supporting the Kosovo war, including a prominent piece by Democratic Socialists of America leader, Bogdan Denitch. Even Jesse Jackson appeared on MSNBC arguing that Martin Luther King would have supported U.S. troops in Kosovo.⁴⁵

Conclusion

There are many Democrats and liberals who have sided with Bush’s war drive—and only wish it to be as painless and bloodless as possible. As the editors of the liberal Democratic Party mouthpiece, *The American Prospect*, explain: “If the deed is to be done, ’twere better done quickly: Let the fighting be mercifully brief, the casualties few, and the American victory complete.”⁴⁶ Moreover, even those Democrats who have been critical of this war are not opposed to U.S. intervention against Iraq, but merely disagree about how to go about doing it.

Nevertheless, unlike the war in Afghanistan, which had broad liberal support, there is a far wider swath of liberal opposition to a unilateral attack on Iraq. *The Nation*, for example, which backed the war in Afghanistan, sees the war against Iraq as a diversion from what they consider to be the legitimate “war on terror.”

Activists must learn the real history of liberals at war if a politically dynamic, broad, and successful opposition to a new slaughter in the desert is to be built. During the last war against Iraq, many liberal groups including Sane-Freeze (now Peace Action) called for sanctions as an alternative to war (though even then it was clear that sanc-

tions were a *component* of the war), and were horrified later that sanctions killed even more than the bombings. Some in antiwar circles today worry that anti-imperialist arguments inside a broad movement that expose liberal equivocation and support of the war will drive away those new to activism and politics. But increased clarity about what the real aims of the U.S. are in the Middle East—control of oil—and about who poses the biggest threat to the region—the U.S.—will strengthen, not weaken, the movement.

Journalist Liza Featherstone wrote in *The Nation* that the Left should drop its talk of the Afghanistan war—“a fait accompli,” as she put it—to build broader opposition to war on Iraq. Exactly the opposite is true. The Afghan war killed thousands and has left that country run by fanatical warlords led by a president handpicked by the U.S., and it has done nothing to halt terrorism. Almost every Democrat in Congress and liberal publication supported that war, in which fighting terror was used as a pretext for advancing U.S. strategic aims in the region that had been planned before September 11. It was the *lack* of a large anti-imperialist opposition that allowed political confusion and isolation to sideline the burgeoning movement that was attacked by liberals and the Bush hawks alike.

The strength of the new movement is its breadth. There are now hundreds of thousands of people across the country committed to protesting this war—and that number is growing. But there are many liberals whose commitment to opposing this war will flag and even collapse if the U.S. is able to get UN approval for it. There is a difference between building a movement that invites broad participation and activism around a simple set of demands—against war, against sanctions—and downplaying the importance of clear politics. The clearer our movement is about what drives American foreign policy, the need to reject the lies about “fighting terrorism” and other excuses for imperial power projection, and the role the Democratic Party has played as a supporter of U.S. power abroad, the stronger our movement will be.

1 Dennis Kucinich, “The bloodstained path,” *The Progressive*, November 2002, 16. Italics added.

2 Alan Maass, “Will the Democrats ever fight?” *Socialist Worker*, October 18, 2002, 8.

3 Sidney Lens, *The Forging of the American Empire* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971), 220.

4 *Ibid.*, 195.

5 *Ibid.*, 186.

6 *Ibid.*, 225.

7 *Ibid.*, 239–243.

8 *Ibid.*, 267.

9 *Ibid.*, 266.

10 *Ibid.*, 313.

11 Trotsky quoted in Ashley Smith, “World War II: The good war?,” *International Socialist Review*, issue 10 (Winter 2000): 53–54.

12 Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years, 1933–37* (New York: Random House, 1986), 372.

13 *Ibid.*, 675.

14 Lens, 311.

15 Lens, 334.

16 Lens, 326.

- 17 Smith, 57.
- 18 Lens, 347.
- 19 Freda Kirchwey, "One world or none," *The Nation*, August 18, 1945 available at www.thenation.com.
- 20 Lens, 421.
- 21 Herbert S. Parmet, *The Democrats: The Years After FDR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 167.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 173.
- 23 Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 469.
- 24 Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 117–118.
- 25 Jonathan Neale, *The American War: Vietnam, 1960-1975*, (London: Bookmarks, 2001), 54.
- 26 Zinn, 469.
- 27 Lance Selfa, *Socialists and the Democratic Party: A Lesser Evil?* (Chicago: Bookmarks, 1988), 27.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 27.
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- 30 Kolko, 324.
- 31 Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time* (London: Bookmarks, 1988), 29.
- 32 Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 411.
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- 35 Stephen Zunes, "Carter's less-known legacy," online at www.commondreams.org, October 18, 2002.
- 36 Lance Selfa, "The real history of a Nobel winner," *Socialist Worker*, November 1, 2002, 9.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 1980 State of the Union Address, Jimmy Carter Library Web site, at www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml.
- 39 Bill Clinton, in a press conference, online at www.americanpresident.org.
- 40 *60 Minutes* interview, May 12, 1996.
- 41 Quoted in Zinn, 638.
- 42 See "New Masters of the Balkans," *International Socialist Review* 8 (Summer 1999), for a full explanation of the history and politics of the war.
- 43 Michel Chussodovsky, "Impact of NATO bombing (till April 11)," Press release of the Ad-hoc Committee to Stop Canada's Participation in the War in Yugoslavia, April 19, 1999.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 "The liberals' war," *International Socialist Review* 7 (Spring 1999): 6.
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2 Bill Clinton and the “New Democrats”

Eight Years of Clinton-Gore:
The Price of Lesser-Evilism

Bush’s Offensive,
Democrats’ Retreat

The Democrats and the
Bush Doctrine:
The Other War Party

Eight Years of Clinton-Gore

The Price of

Lesser Evilism

NOTHING BETTER EXEMPLIFIED the spirit of the Clinton-Gore years than the May 24, 2000, Democratic fundraiser held in Washington, D.C.'s MCI Center. Pulling in a record \$26.5 million in one evening, the Democrats paid tribute to their fundraiser-in-chief, outgoing President Bill Clinton. But unlike the blue-blooded Republicans, who dined on gourmet goat cheese at their recent fundraiser, the Democrats ate barbecue served on paper plates. In keeping with this fake populism, organizers encouraged all who attended to wear blue jeans.¹

The MCI Center spectacle typified the administration it honored. Like the Clinton-Gore administration, it hid its pro-corporate agenda behind a fog of populist rhetoric. Like the administration, it beat the Republicans at their own game.

The Democratic Party moneybags who gathered in the MCI Center could thank the Clinton-Gore regime for producing "prosperity and progress" for them, the richest Americans. Yet this was an administration that arrived in Washington dedicated—in the words of its election manifesto, *Putting People First*—to helping ordinary people "who worked hard, and played by the rules."

Putting profits first

Clinton won the 1992 election calling for change from Reagan-Bush's "12 years of trickle-down economics." Instead, in his first couple of years as president, he pushed harder for passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the 1994 crime bill than he did for anything that helped win him the election. The health care system overhaul that was supposed to be his signature achievement collapsed in 1994. Public disappointment ran so high that the 1994 election delivered the Congress—a Democratic bastion for 60 years—into the hands

of the Gingrich Republicans.

Within a year, Clinton figured out a modus operandi to deal with the Republican Congress and to recapture public support in the polls. Clinton adopted most of the GOP program, including its retrograde "welfare reform." At the same time, he staged high-profile battles with the Republican Neanderthals to show that they were "going too far." This strategy revived Clinton's presidency.

But after regaining the initiative, Clinton immediately embraced "bipartisanship," signing off on a 1997 budget agreement that slashed billions from important programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Yet even this accommodation with the right-wing Congress won him few friends, as the same Congress spent most of the next year trying to drive him from office. The vigor with which Clinton and his surrogates fought off the Republican scandalmongers contrasted sharply with their failure to mount campaigns for health care reform or civil rights.

Clintonism may appear as nothing more than a series of poll-driven maneuvers intended to keep Clinton one step ahead of his political foes. But from the start, the Clinton-Gore administration pursued a well thought-out and deeply conservative political project. This "New Democrat"

This article was first published in ISR 13 (August–September 2000).

agenda emerged in the 1980s as the program of a faction of conservative Democrats determined to break the Democratic Party's identification with organized labor, civil rights, and other traditionally liberal causes. Embodied in the corporate-funded Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), this faction succeeded in capturing the party machinery in 1992. It placed two of its chief leaders—Clinton and Gore—at the top of the Democratic ticket.

Four core ideas embodied Clintonism, according to journalist Ronald Brownstein: “opportunity and responsibility,” “economic globalism,” “fiscal discipline,” and “government as catalyst.”² “Opportunity and responsibility” describes the Clinton-Gore “idea that government should both help those willing to help themselves and enforce common standards of behavior.” Clinton put it more crudely in describing his plans to force welfare recipients to work for their benefits: “We will do with you. We will not do for you.”³

“Economic globalism” means the single-minded pursuit of free trade and free market policies around the world. “Fiscal discipline” describes Clinton economic policies that generated record federal budget surpluses and the lowest level of government spending since the Eisenhower administration.⁴ Finally, “government as catalyst” describes a series of small-scale initiatives—from establishing a right to non-paid family medical leave to tax credits for college tuition—that are Clinton-Gore hallmarks. All of these share similar characteristics. They sounded like good reforms of a deeply flawed system, and sometimes they even addressed critical social needs. But they were usually so minimal as to come nowhere near filling the social need they were supposed to meet. What's more, they tended to stress private-sector initiatives, as when the administration marketed tax breaks for business as its anti-poverty program during its 1999 “poverty tour” of depressed areas.

Conservative David Frum, writing in *Weekly Standard*, captured the essence of Clintonism:

Since 1994, Clinton has offered the Democratic Party a devilish bargain: Accept and defend policies you hate (welfare reform, the Defense of Marriage Act), condone and excuse crimes (perjury, campaign finance abuses) and I'll deliver you the executive branch of government....He has assuaged the Left by continually proposing bold new programs—the expansion of Medicare to 55 year olds, a national day-care program, the reversal of welfare reform, the hooking up of the Internet to every classroom, and now the socialization of the means of production via Social Security. And he has placated the Right by dropping every one of these programs as soon as he proposed it. Clinton makes speeches, Rubin and Greenspan make policy, the Left gets words, the Right gets deeds.⁵

Clintonomics: boom for whom?

“It's the economy stupid.” By now, nearly everyone has heard this slogan of Clinton's 1992 campaign advisers. It held the key to Clinton's victory over Bush as the country remained mired in a recession in the early 1990s. Clinton took office promising to focus on the economy “like a laser beam.” In keeping with his populist cam-

aign themes, he pledged a “stimulus package” to create jobs and a “middle-class tax cut” to put money in ordinary people's pockets. While these two pledges proved popular in the campaign, Clinton jettisoned both of them within months of taking office. The stimulus package fell to a Republican filibuster in the Congress. But Clinton withdrew the tax-cut proposal of his own accord.

That's because his central economic policy—the 1993 budget plan—enshrined “deficit reduction” as the administration's chief aim. The bill, passed without a single Republican vote in Congress, raised taxes on the wealthiest Americans, expanded the earned income tax credit for the working poor, and increased a variety of regressive excise taxes. Abandoning his proposals for “investments” in education and job training, Clinton's “deficit reduction plan” won support on Wall Street. “Clinton's willingness to raise taxes to close the deficit proved reassuring to a different kind of traditionally Republican constituency—the bond traders, who, initially at least, brought long term interest rates down,” wrote E. J. Dionne. “The bond sellers made Clinton's willingness to support some sort of levy on the middle class a test of his ‘seriousness’ about deficit reduction.”⁶

The other major piece of economic legislation passed in 1993—ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in October—added another fundamental plank to the Clinton-Gore economic program. Clinton and Gore went all-out to win NAFTA, shunting aside protests from labor and environmentalists. If the 1993 budget plan enshrined “deficit reduction” as a domestic economic strategy, NAFTA established “free trade” as the holy writ of the Clinton-Gore foreign economic strategy. Subsequent free trade initiatives, such as the 1994 ratification of the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the 2000 approval of “permanent normal trade relations” with China, showed that no modern administration has been as aggressive in pushing deals for American business around the globe.

The administration's pro-business policies went farther than simply “deficit reduction.” Clinton and his treasury secretaries Lloyd Bentsen, Robert Rubin, and Larry Summers allowed conservative Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan a free hand to jack up short-term interest rates at any hint of inflation, real or imagined. The Clinton Justice Department's current antitrust action against Microsoft Corp. aside, the administration has actively encouraged deregulation and monopolization in the military, telecommunications, and finance industries.

And despite a lot of pro-environment rhetoric from the administration, big business has had little to fear in the area of environmental regulation. “We just don't have unlimited resources to enforce all these measures and that can create a backlash [from corporations],” said Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol Browner. “So we need to be realistic.” For the Clinton-Gore administration, “being realistic” meant sacrificing environmental protection at the first hint of any corporate objection. After fierce industry lobbying, the admin-

istration preserved sweetheart deals allowing the mining industry to pillage federal lands and the timber industry to clear-cut old-growth forests. In 1995, it opened some federal land holdings to oil drilling—a decision that enriched Occidental Petroleum and the vice president, an Occidental stockholder. Browner even allowed sugar growers and land developers—including a few Clinton-Gore campaign contributors—to dump polluted water into the Florida Everglades. The Clinton-Gore administration signed the 1997 Kyoto Agreement, a worldwide treaty aimed to limit global warming. But it didn't even try to win treaty ratification in the U.S. Senate.⁷

By the time the GOP took over Congress in 1995, Clinton had already adopted “Republican-lite” economic policies. Only Clinton's embrace of the goal of a balanced federal budget by 2002 went further. As it turned out, his “deficit reduction” policies produced the first federal budget surplus in a generation in 1998. Clinton and Gore set their sights on eliminating the federal debt for the first time since 1835. Their conversion to the balanced-budget religion virtually ruled out any major government initiative to expand access to education, health care, or Social Security. In the early 1990s, with the economy pulling out of recession, Clinton argued for “shared sacrifice” and budget austerity to “get our economic house in order.”

IN 2000, with the budget running surpluses, Clinton and Gore continued to tout the need for austerity. Gore ruled out stimulative deficit spending in the face of a future recession. Instead, Gore said, a recession “should be viewed as an opportunity to [downsize government further] before any other options are considered.” For echoing Depression-era President Herbert Hoover, Gore “should wash his mouth out with soap,” said Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Solow.⁸

From Wall Street's point of view, Clinton's eight years in office have to be viewed as a smashing success. When he took office, the New York Stock Exchange's Dow Jones Industrial Average stood at 3,300. At the time of writing, it stands at more than 10,000. Inflation dropped to imperceptible levels and, in May 2000, unemployment hit a 30-year low of 3.9 percent. Between 1992 and 1997, corporate profits grew by an average of 15 percent annually.⁹ The U.S. had clearly zoomed ahead as the world's leading economy.

Yet all that glittered in the “miracle economy” wasn't gold. Of the 22.5 million jobs created since the American boom began, about half of them pay less than \$7 an hour. And the number of part-time workers desiring full-time work, combined with the number of low-wage (\$7/hour or less) workers, is three times the number of workers without jobs.¹⁰ Low unemployment has boosted wages, but only back to 1989 levels in real terms.

To achieve even that standard of living, Americans work six weeks longer per year than they did in the 1970s. Even with the tax increases in Clinton's 1993 budget plan, the wealthy pay a substantially lower percentage of their income in taxes than they did in 1977.¹¹ Meanwhile, 38 million Americans remain poor by the

government's own statistics, which underestimate the true level of poverty, according to many experts.

This growing gap between rich and poor was no accident. It followed directly from the Clinton-Gore economic program. Whenever Clinton faced a choice between economic policies favoring Wall Street or those that might help Main Street, “in almost every instance, [Clinton] took the route favored by Wall Street, business executives and conventional economists, not the ones that ordinary people might have favored and that almost certainly would have been easier to defend politically.”¹²

Undoing the New Deal

Of all the Clinton-Gore administration's actions over the course of its eight years, none will have a more far-reaching—and destructive—impact than Clinton's signing of the 1996 welfare repeal bill. Peter Edelman, a Health and Human Services official who resigned in protest, called the bill “the worst thing Bill Clinton has done.” The welfare repeal bill represented one 1992 election promise Clinton didn't break. Pledging to “end welfare as we know it” during the campaign, Clinton opened the door to the reactionary legislation he signed in 1996. Welfare repeal ended the 61-year-old guarantee of some income for the poorest Americans. It eliminated federal standards for welfare benefits. It imposed a five-year lifetime limit and a two-year continuous limit on benefits. It barred immigrants from receiving welfare and cut \$24 billion from the federal food-stamp program. It marked the first time that a piece of the 1935 Social Security Act was repealed.

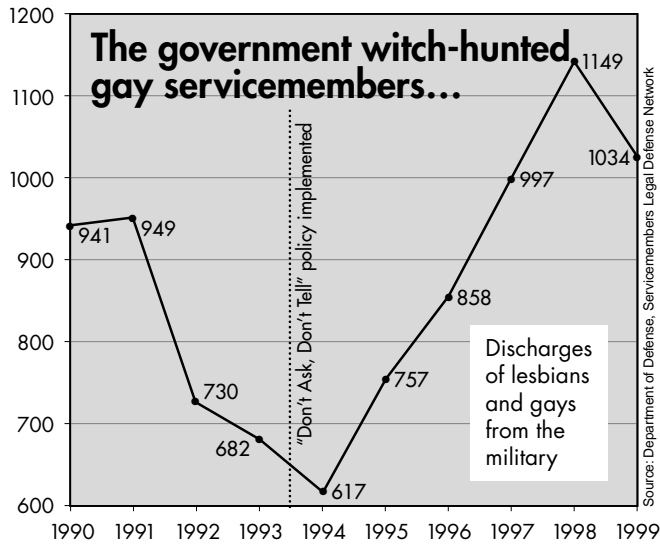
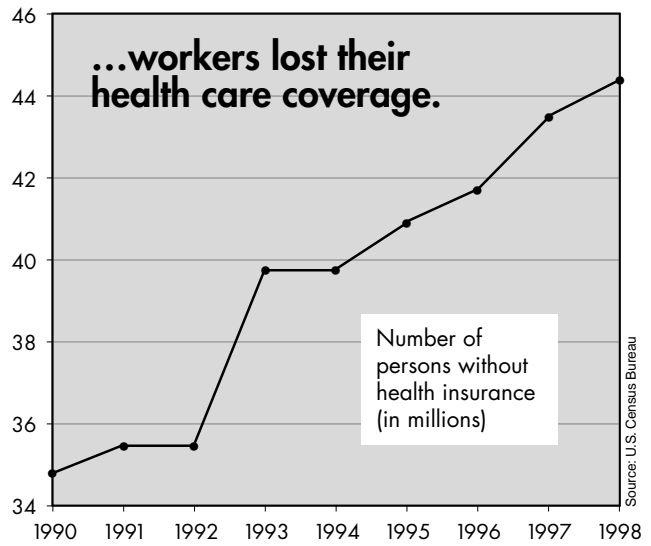
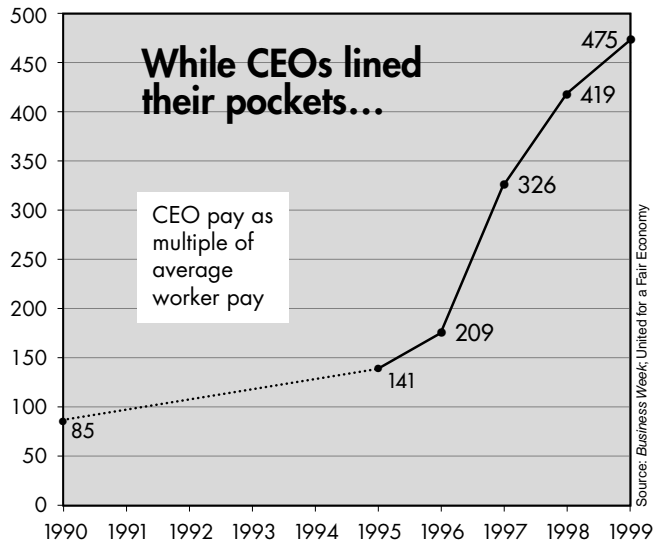
Clinton's own Health and Human Services Department estimated that the bill would throw at least 1.1 million children into poverty. Other experts produced estimates three times higher. Despite these terrible consequences, Clinton received very little organized opposition to welfare repeal. Edelman conceded that

so many of those who would have shouted their opposition from the rooftops if a Republican president had done this were boxed in by their desire to see the president re-elected and in some cases by their own votes for the bill.¹³

Clinton didn't sign the bill because a Republican Congress forced him to. With no chance of losing to Sen. Robert Dole in the 1996 elections, he didn't even have the excuse of political expediency. He signed it because he supported it. “Welfare reform” had always topped the New Democrat agenda.

The economic expansion has forestalled the full impact of welfare repeal. And the five-year term limits will kick in when Clinton is tending to his presidential library in 2002. But already millions of poor people have felt the cuts at the state level. Almost half a million children who would have been lifted from poverty before welfare repeal passed remain in poverty, according to one study.¹⁴ The welfare caseload has dropped from 5 million families in 1994 to around 2.5 million today. Federal and state governments spend \$10.6 billion less than they did in 1994. But most states have pocketed federal welfare

The Clinton-Gore Years...By the Numbers



block-grant money rather than making it available to poor people.¹⁵ Meanwhile, demands for food assistance and emergency shelter showed their largest annual increases since the early 1990s in cities across the country, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors.¹⁶

Few would have predicted that “welfare repeal” would stand as the Clinton-Gore administration’s most far-reaching change to social policy. Clinton arrived in office promising to pass national health care reform. But in seeking a “New Democrat” solution that preserved the central role of the biggest insurance companies in managing the health care system, he handcuffed himself from the start. As soon as small insurance companies mounted an attack on his 1994 proposal, Republicans and many congressional Democrats lined up in opposition. With every attack on health care reform, Clinton retreated. In the end, health care reform wasn’t so much defeated as it was compromised away, piece by piece, until there was nothing left. The bill never even came to a vote in Congress. Since, Clinton has advocated smaller-scale reforms like a toothless “Patients’ Bill of Rights,” and Medicare coverage for prescription drugs.

Clinton often takes credit for defending Medicare and Social Security against Republican efforts to slash and burn both. But when the administration completed the 1997 Balanced Budget Agreement (BBA) with the congressional Republican leadership, it endorsed the GOP’s long-term goal of gutting spending on “entitlements” like Medicare and Medicaid. Between 2000 and 2005, the BBA will impose more than twice the \$112 billion in Medicare cuts the Congressional Budget Office predicted. These austerity measures accounted for the first-ever annual decline in Medicare spending in 1999. Millions have already felt the cuts in higher fees and fewer services. Between 1997 and 1998, the number of sick and elderly receiving Medicare-financed home health-care services fell an astounding 45 percent, with 600,000 fewer people receiving care.¹⁷ The BBA’s draconian spending “caps” on the rest of “discretionary” programs from home heating assistance to legal services could force unprecedented cuts of 15 to 20 percent over the next eight years.¹⁸ Under the BBA, Clinton-Gore literally abandoned millions of poor, sick, elderly, and disabled Americans.

What’s more, the Clinton-Gore agreement with the GOP laid the groundwork for moving Medicare from a system that guarantees benefits to one that will provide vouchers so patients can buy insurance—if they can afford it. In other words, this free-market solution will reintroduce all of the worst aspects of for-profit health care that Medicare was created to combat. At the same time, while denouncing Republican attempts to privatize Social Security, Clinton and Gore’s proposal to invest some Social Security money in the stock market already starts down that road. Unless these free-market plans to wreck Medicare and Social Security are stopped, tens of millions of Americans face a cruel future.¹⁹

Kicking labor in the teeth

In 1992, Clinton won labor support with promises to

ban scabs in strikes and to fight for a minimum wage increase. Instead, he spent most of his political capital on legislation that organized labor opposed. Clinton twisted arms and passed the pork barrel to whip up support for NAFTA’s passage in 1993. At the time, he even denounced labor for using “real roughshod, muscle-bound tactics” to oppose the free-trade deal. But when congressional Democrats introduced the anti-scab bill in 1994, Clinton barely lifted a finger as the bill fell to a Republican Senate filibuster. The AFL-CIO’s political impotence—and the 1994 “Republican revolution”—provoked a fight inside the federation. In 1995, the federation ousted the encrusted Lane Kirkland leadership in favor of John Sweeney’s “New Voices” slate.

The Gingrich GOP and the 1995 changing of the guard at the top of the AFL-CIO brought closer coordination between the White House and organized labor. When the Democrats controlled Congress during Clinton’s first term, Clinton did not mention the minimum wage once in any public statement. But with the GOP in charge of Congress, the minimum wage became a potent issue against the Gingrichites. The administration managed to push a minimum wage increase through the right-wing Congress, shoring up its labor support for the 1996 and 1998 elections.

Despite owing Democratic congressional gains in 1996 and 1998 to AFL-CIO get-out-the-vote drives, the Clinton administration had no qualms about tossing labor aside when it could score points with big business. In February 1997, Clinton used the 1926 Railway Labor Act to outlaw an American Airlines pilots’ strike. “[E]veryone understands that [American Airlines CEO] Bob Crandall’s latest coup is getting Bill Clinton to side with management over labor,” the Clinton-hating *Wall Street Journal* editorialized.²⁰ Under its “Reinventing OSHA” initiative—which stresses “partnership” with business and “voluntary” compliance with regulations—the administration turned its back on workplace safety. During the Clinton-Gore administration, the number of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) workplace inspections is at its lowest, and the percentage of serious charges against corporations OSHA dismissed is at its highest since Congress created the agency in 1973.

Labor displayed a kind of schizophrenia about the administration. It wanted the White House to take it seriously as a “partner,” but it knew the White House wouldn’t return the favor. Still, the AFL-CIO was willing to go to extraordinary lengths to prove its loyalty to the New Democrats. In the lead-up to the 1999 WTO summit in Seattle, Sweeney joined with a dozen major corporate CEOs to endorse the Clinton trade policy. But no amount of loyalty to Clinton-Gore brought labor much consideration. Sweeney’s signature had hardly dried on the pro-WTO declaration when the White House announced its intention to flout labor and environmental standards in a trade deal with China. Labor exacted some measure of revenge in the streets of Seattle.

Likewise, Sweeney engineered an early federation en-

dorsement of Gore in 1999, helping Gore to push aside a challenge from New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley. Labor ignored the fact that Gore, as the official in charge of the administration's "reinventing government" program slashed the federal workforce by 17 percent (377,000 workers).²¹ Only a few months later, the AFL-CIO and Gore found themselves again on opposite sides of the vote for permanent normal trading status with China. Despite all of this, the federation remained firmly in Gore's camp.

Feeding the prison industrial complex

While Clinton and Gore presided over a retreat of government responsibility to meet human needs, the administration continuously expanded the government's policing of every aspect of life. Two-thirds of congressional Democrats supported Clinton-Gore's 1994 Omnibus Crime Control Act. This \$33 billion monstrosity expanded the use of the federal death penalty to 60 crimes, appropriated \$10 billion for a vast expansion of prison building, and offered money to localities to hire 100,000 police. In 1996, Clinton's Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act greatly curtailed death row prisoners' habeas corpus appeals and established arbitrary time limits on death row appeals. On Clinton's watch, the U.S. prison population nearly doubled and the number of executions jumped to its highest level in four decades.

With Clinton's full support, a spate of bills supposedly directed at fighting terrorism took away ordinary people's civil rights. Under the 1996 "antiterrorism" legislation, Americans can be prosecuted for raising money for organizations the government considers "terrorist." Hundreds of legal immigrants who have lived in this country for years have been arrested and deported because immigration officials found that they were convicted of petty crimes years ago. As in Third World dictatorships, suspects can be arrested, charged, and convicted on the grounds of secret testimony that the defendant's lawyer can't challenge.

The Clinton-Gore agenda reeked of an authoritarian moralism that meted out punishment to ordinary people who didn't conform to the administration's approved standards of "personal responsibility." Clinton's Housing and Urban Development Department in 1995 announced a "one-strike-and-you're-out" policy of expelling whole families from public housing on the mere suspicion that one family member was using drugs. The 1996 welfare reform law requires women to disclose the identity of their children's fathers under penalty of losing benefits. This dovetailed nicely with the Clinton-Gore crusade against "deadbeat" dads. Clinton filled his 1996 reelection campaign with proposals the Christian Right could endorse: V-chips in televisions, teenage sexual abstinence, and school uniforms. Twice, Clinton signed bills censoring content on the Internet and cable television. Both times, the Supreme Court overturned them. All of this from a man who told his impeachment inquisitors to keep their noses out of his personal life.

Civil rights: Lots of "dialogue," little action

It hardly needs to be said that the Clinton-Gore administration's law-and-order policies—and their crusades for "personal responsibility"—fell the heaviest on African Americans, Latinos, and other racial minorities. This was no accident, because abandoning any notion of government action to correct racial injustice has been central to New Democrat politics from the start. In fact, the conservative Democrats who launched the DLC saw it largely as a vehicle to counter Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. At best, the Clinton-Gore administration has promoted a "race-neutral" approach to social policy that simply tried to avoid issues of racial discrimination. At worst, it pandered to racism by scapegoating Black welfare recipients or Latino immigrants. On several occasions, it took actions it knew to be discriminatory.

Clinton signaled his retreat on civil rights early when he abandoned Lani Guinier, his original choice to head the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, in the face of a hysterical right-wing campaign branding Guinier a "quota queen." When conservatives and the Supreme Court attacked affirmative action programs, Clinton-Gore again retreated. While claiming a posture of wanting to "mend" rather than "end" affirmative action, Clinton ordered the end of dozens of federal affirmative action "set-aside" programs. "I've done more to eliminate programs—affirmative action programs—I didn't think were fair," Clinton boasted in one of the 1996 presidential debates, "and to tighten others up than my predecessors have since affirmative action's been around."²² Clinton operatives actually sabotaged the 1996 campaign against an anti-affirmative action California ballot initiative. If Clinton's Democrats took a strong stand against the initiative, they argued, it would only energize conservative voters, whose turnout could jeopardize Clinton's reelection support in California.²³

While refusing to take any risks to oppose racism, the Clinton-Gore administration acted consciously to perpetuate racism in other cases. The administration pressed the Congressional Black Caucus to drop from the 1994 crime bill a "Racial Justice Act" that required assurances that the death penalty wouldn't be administered in a racially discriminatory way. And the administration refused to change federal drug sentencing laws on crack cocaine that overwhelmingly discriminate against Black offenders. In light of this sorry record, it was hard to take seriously Clinton's 1997 "Presidential Initiative on Race." Clinton established a commission of respected individuals who could have used their positions to call for a national commitment to fight racism. When the commission finally issued its report in 1998, it included few specific proposals. The administration hoped for such an outcome, as one commission member, former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean—a *Republican*—pointed out: "Race is very divisive. As the year wore on, people became—not the board, but the people in the Administration—became concerned. We were not encouraged to be bold. My recommendation was much bolder than any-

Top 12 Corporate Soft Money Donations, 2000 Election cycle

Corporation	Total given	to Democrats	to Republicans
AT&T	\$3,204,767	\$1,230,350	\$1,974,417
Microsoft Corp.	\$1,767,575	\$744,292	\$1,023,283
Phillip Morris	\$1,659,790	\$256,641	\$1,403,149
Freddie Mac.	\$1,568,250	\$575,000	\$993,250
Enron Corp.	\$1,287,015	\$359,565	\$927,450
Citigroup Inc.	\$1,246,351	\$647,056	\$599,295
SBC Communications	\$1,224,373	\$691,150	\$533,233
United Parcel Service	\$1,126,921	\$142,162	\$984,759
Pfizer Inc.	\$1,132,521	\$160,000	\$972,521
Joseph E. Seagram & Sons	\$1,105,989	\$779,220	\$326,769
Verizon Communications	\$1,067,171	\$463,800	\$603,371
Slim-Fast Foods/Thompson Medical	\$1,063,000	\$1,043,000	\$20,000

Source: Center for Responsive Politics (www.opensecrets.org)

thing contained in this report.”²⁴

Clinton and Gore’s record on issues of civil rights for other oppressed groups offers no cause for celebration either. To win support from women’s organizations, Clinton had pledged to appoint a significant number of women to top-ranking positions in his cabinet. When women’s groups pressed Clinton to appoint more women than he initially announced in 1993, Clinton attacked them as “bean counters” who were “playing quota games.” On the election trail, Clinton had pledged to pass a “Freedom of Choice Act” to guarantee the right to abortion. But after his election, he barely mentioned it again. Clinton twice vetoed congressional bans on so-called partial-birth abortions. Yet he allowed congressionally imposed restrictions on abortion for federal employees, District of Columbia residents, and Medicaid recipients to pass.²⁵ In 1998, he proposed a \$22 billion expansion of child-care benefits. When the GOP Congress voted it down, he stopped talking about child-care benefits. Finally, all of the attacks on working people Clinton sponsored—from welfare “reform” to Medicare cuts—disproportionately affect women.

It’s likewise with Clinton and Gore’s positions on gay and lesbian rights. Clinton didn’t answer to the Christian Right, and he appointed a few openly gay advisers. But on most of the main issues on which the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force lobbied, the Clinton administration was on the other side. Clinton’s 1993 “don’t ask, don’t tell” surrender to Pentagon bigots led to a 70 percent increase in discharges of gay service members over the Bush administration’s final year. In 1996, Clinton signed the GOP-inspired Defense of Marriage Act, barring states from approving same-sex marriage. He then touted his support for the bill in ads on Christian radio stations during his 1996 reelection campaign. Despite this, the HRC made Clinton the honored guest at its annual 1997 dinner.²⁶

Cold War lite

In 1993, the Clinton administration inherited a favorable position for the U.S. as a world power. Two years

after the disappearance of its chief military rival, the Soviet Union, the U.S. stood alone as the world’s superpower. As the only military power with a global reach, it spent more on intelligence services than most countries spent on their entire military apparatuses. The U.S. and its allies accounted for 80 percent of world military spending.²⁷

The time was ripe for a “peace dividend,” a major cut in military spending that would free up resources for spending on health care, education, and other social needs that had taken a backseat during the Cold War. Instead, Clinton took the opposite course. Clinton’s plan for the post-Cold War military adopted

most of the outgoing Bush administration’s assumptions. It preserved a Cold War–sized military after the Cold War. The U.S. now spends about 85 percent of what it did at the height of the Cold War to maintain a military with the power to intervene anywhere in the world. In 1998, Clinton announced a six-year boost to the military budget of \$112 billion, including a go-ahead to the Pentagon’s biggest boondoggle, a “national missile defense” system. Ironically, the \$112 billion figure corresponded almost exactly to a 1996 General Accounting Office estimate of the cost to make decrepit U.S. school buildings livable for the nation’s school children.

When Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush’s advisers recently attacked the Clinton-Gore administration for presiding over a decline in military “readiness,” former Reagan administration Pentagon official Lawrence Korb rose to their defense. Korb noted that military budgets under Clinton and Gore actually spent more than President Bush had planned had he won the 1992 election. The budget for training, readiness, and maintenance is actually 40 percent higher per person in uniform than it was under Bush, Korb pointed out.²⁸ Six of Clinton’s eight budgets called for increases in military spending.

Clinton-Gore dispatched troops around the world far more than any other modern administration. Before launching the 1999 war against Yugoslavia, Clinton sent U.S. forces into combat situations 46 times. This compares to only 26 times for Presidents Ford (4), Carter (1), Reagan (14) and Bush (7) combined.²⁹ Clinton, the one-time anti-Vietnam War protester, continued Bush’s 1992 invasion of Somalia, invaded Haiti in 1994, bombed Serbia in 1995 and 1999, Sudan and Afghanistan in 1997, and Iraq almost continuously throughout his administration. To force North Korea into negotiations, Clinton threatened in 1994 a war that could have provoked a nuclear conflict. In 1995, the U.S. aided its Croatian ally in the ethnic cleansing of more than 170,000 Serbs. And it has remained the main enforcer of genocidal sanctions on Iraq, which have killed more than 1 million Iraqis since 1990. In June 2000, the Congress

passed the administration's request for \$1.3 billion in aid to the Colombian military.

The administration's support for sanctions in Iraq and for the death squads in Colombia belied all of its talk about establishing a foreign policy based on human rights. But this had been clear from the start. After denouncing the Bush administration for ordering the forcible repatriation of Haitians fleeing persecution from their country, Clinton did an about face. Bush's policy became Clinton's policy. Blasting Bush for "coddling dictators" in China, Clinton in 1994 removed any human rights considerations from U.S.-China trade. Clinton supported the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia to the bitter end in 1998. And his administration in 1997 lifted the ban on weapons sales to Latin American governments, including present and future military regimes. Given this record, it should come as no surprise that Clinton's "humanitarian" war against Yugoslavia in 1999 produced a catastrophe for ordinary Serbs and Kosovar Albanians alike. "If there is a Clinton Doctrine—an innovation by the present administration in the conduct of foreign policy—it is this: punishing the innocent in order to express indignation at the guilty," wrote one establishment critic of the NATO war.³⁰

The dead end of lesser evilism

As the Clinton-Gore administration headed into its final year, journalist William Greider wrote:

[Clinton's] accomplishments, when the sentimental gestures are set aside, are indistinguishable from George Bush's. Like Bush, Clinton increased the top income tax rate a bit, raised the minimum wage modestly and expanded tax credits for the working poor. He reduced military spending somewhat but, like Bush, failed to restructure the military for post-cold war realities. He got tough on crime, especially drug offenders, and built many more prisons. He championed educational reform. He completed the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was mainly negotiated by the Bush Administration. On these and other matters, one can fairly say that Clinton completed Bush's agenda. It is not obvious that a Democratic successor in the White House would be much different.³¹

Greider's criticisms may make liberals blanch, but he's right. The Clinton-Gore administration pushed through conservative policies—like ending welfare and running a balanced budget—that Republicans could never have won. By all rights, he gave liberals as many reasons to oppose him as they had to oppose Bush. Yet, in every election year, Democrats and their liberal defenders urged a vote for Clinton and the Democrats. The Republicans, they said, would do much worse. Clinton may not be so great, they said, but he was the "lesser of two evils."

Had Reagan or Bush tried many of the policies that Clinton passed, liberal organizations would have mobilized millions to protest—as they did in the late 1980s when a right-wing Supreme Court threatened to repeal *Roe v. Wade*. But with their "friend" Clinton in the White House, they stood by

waiting and hoping and beseeching, working on the inside, faxing and phoning and producing yet another study or poll. Meanwhile, they preach[ed] the gospel of the lesser of two evils, that ever-downward spiral that has brought us to this pass and that will doubtless end with liberals in hell organizing votes for Satan because Beelzebub would be even worse—think of the Supreme Court!³²

As Clinton's Democrats moved even closer to the Republicans, the liberals clinging to Clinton's coattails swung to the right with them. The range of mainstream political opinion narrowed. The Democratic Party that had been identified with Medicare and Social Security became identified with "free trade" and "tough-on-crime" measures. With the Gingrichites waiting in the wings, the Democrats assumed their core constituents would support them no matter what. So Clinton and Gore didn't worry as they produced one betrayal of workers after another. Such was the logic of "lesser evilism."

But in the Clinton-Gore administration's final days, a growing number of activists realized that we don't have to swallow whatever a Democratic White House dishes out. Labor and student organizing against Clinton-Gore's globalization agenda and the swelling movement against the death penalty mark two important pressures on Democrats coming from the Left. Rumbblings of labor and environmentalist support for Green Party candidate Ralph Nader challenged the notion that these constituencies "have nowhere else to go" but the Democrats.

The Democrats predictably played the "lesser evil" card in the 2000 presidential election. Many of those who had expressed disgust with the Gore-Bush choice held their noses and voted for Gore—if only from fear that a President George W. Bush would pack the Supreme Court with hard-right justices. But even if Gore had won the 2000 election, activists would have had no reason to breathe easy. As eight years of Clinton-Gore attacks showed, the lesser evil is still an evil.

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- 3 Clinton quoted in Philip A. Klinkner, "Bill Clinton and the New Liberalism," in Adolph Reed Jr., ed., *Without Justice for All* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), 15.
- 4 See James Hormey and Robert Greenstein, "Is the Clinton Budget a 'Big Government' Proposal?," Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, March 14, 2000, available at www.cbpp.org.
- 5 Quoted in Christopher Hitchens, *No One Left to Lie To* (New York: Verso, 1999), 23.
- 6 E. J. Dionne, *They Only Look Dead* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 113.
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 - 18 See Sam Elkin and Robert Greenstein, "Much of the Projected Non Social Security Surplus is a Mirage," July 12, 1999, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, July 12, 1999.
 - 19 For a critique of drift in Medicare policy, see Judith Feder and Marilyn Moon, "Can Medicare Survive Its Saviors?" *The American Prospect* 44 (May/June, 1999). For a clear critique of plans to privatize Social Security, see Mark Weisbrot and Dean Baker, *Social Security: The Phony Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
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 - 21 The administration brags about this on the "Reinventing Government" Website. See National Partnership for Reinventing Government, "Reinvention@workforyou: Creating a Culture of Change and Reconnecting Americans to their Government, available at <http://www.npr.gov/library/announce/040700.html>.
 - 22 Philip A. Klinkner, "Bill Clinton and the New Liberalism," in Adolph Reed, ed., *Without Justice for All* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), 25.
 - 23 See Marc Cooper, "Letter from California: What cost victory?" *The Nation*, November 4 1996: 11–15.
 - 24 Quoted in Klinkner, pp. 26–27.
 - 25 Elizabeth Schulte, "The new assault on a woman's right to choose," *International Socialist Review* 12 (June–July, 2000): 46. Clinton said he would sign the "partial-birth" abortion ban if its wording were changed.
 - 26 See Lance Selfa, "Gay politics in the U.S.: Which way forward?" *International Socialist Review* 6 (Spring 1999): 15–20.
 - 27 Lawrence Korb, "Sized Up," *Foreign Affairs* 79 (2), March–April 2000: p. 150.
 - 28 Korb, 149.
 - 29 Robert L. Borosage, "Money Talks: The Implications of U.S. Budget Priorities," in Martha Honey and Tom Barry, eds., *Global Focus* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 12. These figures count the number of times presidents are required, under the 1973 War Powers Act, to notify Congress when they send troops abroad to face "imminent hostilities."
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Bush's Offensive, Democrats' Retreat

PRESIDENT BUSH TOOK office in January 2001 as the first person in 112 years to win the presidency while losing the popular vote. His "selection" as president depended on two miniscule advantages: a 5–4 Supreme Court vote and an officially certified 537-vote victory in Florida. Meanwhile, he polled 550,000 fewer votes than Democrat Al Gore in the country as a whole. Since his Florida victory depended on well-documented and systematic disenfranchisement of the Black electorate, a majority of Black Americans refuse to accept Bush. For the first time since 1973, thousands protested a presidential inauguration when Bush took the oath of office on January 20.

Yet when the media marked the administration's "first 100 days," all of this seemed to be forgotten. With polls showing his approval rating hovering around the average for postwar presidents, media outlets rushed to proclaim Bush's administration a success. The *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed, "President Bush marks his 100th day in office...with good grades from a public largely pleased with his job performance save for one area: his handling of the environment." The *New York Times* noted, "Mr. Bush has been widely praised for his administration's discipline, the speed with which he won consensus for what will likely prove to be one of the biggest tax cuts since the Reagan era, and the largely successful way he faced his first foreign challenge, an unexpected confrontation with China."¹ The journalistic hot air provided the required lift to Bush's balloon at the 100-day mark.

In the 2000 election, Bush came within striking distance of Gore for three reasons. First, he marketed himself as a "compassionate conservative" who cares about issues like education and health care. He camouflaged his fundamentally conservative policies in liberalish rhetoric. He would "change the tone" and work for "bipartisanship" in Washington. In this way, Bush and his

handlers managed to force a virtual tie vote in a political climate ripe for a Gore rout. Second, Gore helped Bush. Not only did he run an exceedingly inept campaign, but his "New Democrat" politics ceded tremendous ground to Bush. Polls showed that voters had trouble telling Gore and Bush apart. Finally, Ralph Nader's left-of-center Green Party campaign gave expression to nearly three million voters, the majority of whom would have "held their noses" and voted for Gore if they voted at all.

Bush's conservative agenda lost last year's election. After the Florida fiasco, the conventional wisdom in Washington held that Bush would govern "from the center." He would push for limited goals that had broad appeal across the mainstream political spectrum, we were told. But anyone who seriously believed this nonsense didn't pay attention to the ruthless and antidemocratic fight that Bush and his surrogates waged in Florida. The Bush administration would have none of this talk about centrism. With amazing speed, they moved to impose a solidly right-wing agenda on Washington and the country. In the earliest days after the election, right-wing ideologue Marshall Wittman of the Hudson Institute lamented that "the left won this election." But a

This article was first published in ISR 18 (June–July 2001).

few weeks into the Bush regime, another right-wing ideologue, the Heritage Foundation's Edwin Feulner, proclaimed Bush's gang to be "more Reaganite than Reagan."

Goodbye to "compassionate conservatism"

The Bush administration's attacks on working people make a mockery of the "compassion" that was supposed to define his conservatism. Bush's decisions on a series of last-minute Clinton regulations—from scrapping standards on arsenic levels in drinking water to supporting congressional repeal of workplace safety regulations—received the most attention in his administration's early days. But his entire agenda seeks to turn back the clock on federal policy across the board.

At the center of Bush's political and economic strategy has been his call for a \$1.6 trillion tax cut that will flow primarily into the pockets of the richest 1 percent of the population. By approving the tax cuts (barely modified), Congress has not only rewarded Bush's main campaign contributors; the tax cuts serve a longer-term conservative strategy—to wipe out the federal budget surplus and, as a result, to deny resources for liberal priorities like health care or education. To finance these tax cuts, Bush's proposed 2002 budget pledged to hold federal spending to a 4 percent overall increase, compared to the 8 percent increase Clinton's last budget financed. Bush proposes accomplishing this with across-the-board cuts in a broad array of federal programs. The Bush tax cut is the signature of his domestic policy. All other budgetary changes are merely window dressing. Even Congress's slightly scaled-back tax cut will likely be large enough to accomplish Bush's strategic goals.

The Bush tax cut is only the first step in Bush's planned advance to a full neoliberal program of widespread privatization of government, including privatization of Social Security and Medicare. This, combined with his support for vouchers to finance private-school education, shows the administration's ideological devotion to the loopyest of free-market proposals. Another signature proposal, Bush's plan to contract out government social welfare administration to faith-based organizations, serves two aims at once. First, it bolsters the privatization of the welfare state. Second, it satisfies his core supporters among religious conservatives.

Bush's social policies also bear the Religious Right's stamp. From the appointment of Neanderthal John Ashcroft as attorney general to that of John Walters as drug czar, the administration has placed true-believer conservatives in important positions. It further plans to stack the judiciary with clones of Supreme Court reactionaries Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas. Bush's first decision—to restore Reagan's ban on support for overseas family planning agencies that counsel abortion—signaled his plan to turn back the clock. It remains to be seen just how brazenly Bush wants to strike directly at legalized abortion. But there's no doubt that Bush and his henchman want to shift social policy on drugs, abortion, civil rights, and other social issues decisively to the right.

Finally, Bush's foreign policy unmistakably aims to

increase the willingness and ability of the U.S. to act unilaterally to dominate the world. He advocates his central foreign policy plan—to build and deploy a "national missile defense"—as a defensive measure to counter a "rogue state." In reality, missile defense implements U.S. domination of space—a frontier where no potential competitor can go. With the old Soviet threat gone, administration hawks clearly view China as the next military competitor. Bush's early actions—from publicly undermining South Korea's attempted rapprochement with North Korea to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's leaked plans to reorient U.S. military deployments to the Asia-Pacific region—aim to start a new Cold War with China. Bush's rhetoric about "skipping a generation" of weapons portends a huge increase in military spending whose aim is to place an insurmountable technological and firepower distance between the U.S. and any other country on earth. The combination of these policies—once thought to be Reagan-era fantasies—serves the goal of "detering potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role."²

Is the Bush agenda popular?

Given the sharp right turn that Bush is trying to execute, it's amazing how little his policies have managed to shake the Washington status quo. With so little opposition coming from the so-called opposition party, the Democrats, and with the media rolling over for Bush, the administration has managed to convince itself that its policies are popular. Bush's early travels to barnstorm for his policies before largely pro-Republican crowds (at the 100-day mark, he had managed to visit 26 states—more than any other modern president) seemed based on this assumption. Yet, after all of the well-choreographed hype, Bush had little to show for it. Support for his tax cuts barely broke 50 percent in most opinion polls. And when polls allowed respondents to rank the importance of tax cuts along with other priorities—like increased spending on education or medical care—tax cuts fell to the bottom of the list.³ Majorities opposed his anti-environmental policies.

Perhaps more worrisome for Bush (despite the administration's general disdain for public opinion) is the widespread impression that he is what Ralph Nader called him: "a corporation disguised as a human being." The ABC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll taken in late April found that less than half the public thinks Bush understands their problems. By a 2 to 1 factor, they think he supports corporations over ordinary people. And when pollsters asked them to choose what was more important to them, "holding down the size of government" or "providing needed services," respondents chose "providing needed services" by a 62 percent to 31 percent margin. When pollsters asked the public to choose Bush's priorities, they said that he favored "holding down the size of government" (62 percent) over "providing needed services" (31 percent). Meanwhile, the ruling class's effort to prop up Bush's legitimacy hasn't hoodwinked as many Americans as the establishment likes to think. A *USA*

Today/CNN/Gallup poll showed that only 50 percent believe that Bush won the election “fair and square.” Forty-eight percent divided between those who said he won the election “on a technicality” (29 percent) and those who said he “stole the election.”⁴ The same poll showed that two-thirds of Black Americans believe that Bush “stole the election.” Urban residents and trade unionists—two groups who turned out in the largest numbers for Gore last November—expressed the most intense dislike for Bush.⁵

The polls show that Bush’s agenda is far from popular. Questions about his stolen election persist. Yet he continues to advance his policies with little opposition. There’s only one reason for this: the pathetic response from the Democratic “opposition.” This contrasts sharply to the eight-year holy war that Republicans and their media mouthpieces waged against the Clinton-Gore administration, despite its Republican-lite politics. *Washington Post* political reporter John F. Harris explained:

In Clinton’s first term, Rep. Richard K. Armey (R-Texas) turned to Democrats and said, “Your president is just not that important to us.” This underscores the irony that Bush, whose ascension was clouded by questions over whether he really won, has been accorded more legitimacy by the opposition than Clinton was—or than Gore would have had he become president while losing the popular vote.⁶

Not a single Republican voted for Clinton’s first-year budget in 1993—despite its emphasis on fiscal austerity and deficit reduction. Yet, in the early Bush administration, congressional Democrats provided the margin of victory for the GOP-sponsored repeal of workplace safety regulations. And two-thirds of Democrats in the party’s last redoubt of institutional power in Washington, the U.S. Senate, voted for bankruptcy reform legislation that will bring real harm on working people. Eight Democrats crossed the aisle to make Ashcroft attorney general. With actions like this, the Democratic Party proved itself “dead...expired and gone to meet its maker,” according to former labor secretary Robert Reich’s parody of an old Monty Python skit about a dead parrot.⁷

Even though public opinion is skeptical of Bush and opposed to most of his priorities, the Democrats don’t seem to have the partisan gumption to fan this sentiment. All of the “inside baseball” explanations for the Democrats’ passivity in the face of Bush’s attack (inexperience in acting as an opposition, lack of a single spokesperson, uncertainty about congressional redistricting, etc.) place second to the real reason. As one of the two main governing capitalist parties in the U.S., the Democrats reflect the neoliberal capitalist consensus that all major governing parties—from traditional conservatives to social democrats—adopted in the last decade. For big business, the free-market devotees in the GOP (a party that used to have a “moderate” and even “liberal” wing) are the preferred alternative. But the Democrats are a good second choice. In the 2000 election, the Democrats drew virtually even with Republicans in raising “soft money.” As the editors of *Monthly Review* put it in a

February 2001 editorial:

The transformation of the Democrats was fully accomplished over the past eight years. A turning point came when Clinton selected Gore as his vice-presidential candidate in 1992. Prior to that date, conservative or centrist Democrats like Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter had “balanced” the ticket with liberals like Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale. With Clinton’s selection of Gore, it was a formal recognition that the liberal wing of the party was losing serious clout. Any short list of the major legislative accomplishments of the Clinton-Gore administration would include: passage of a Draconian crime law; the approval of NAFTA and GATT and the creation of the WTO; the Telecommunications Act of 1996; the elimination of federal welfare guarantees to poor children and single mothers; and maintenance and expansion of military spending. These are all issues traditionally championed by the right wing of the Republican Party. There are hardly any progressive measures anywhere to be found on the Clinton-Gore report card and not one major issue where they squared off with the needs of the wealthy and put all their influence on the line to go to bat for their voting base.⁸

Despite Gore’s loss and Clinton’s disgrace, they’ve left their stamp on the party. The party of official liberalism—that once promoted itself as the party of the New Deal and the Great Society—is now the party of fiscal responsibility and law and order. Even when it would benefit Democrats to promote government action to address the real needs of ordinary people—from health care to child care—the stifling centrist consensus rules it out of bounds. Given that, it’s no surprise that Democrats simply nibble at the edges of Bush’s agenda, rather than taking it on full force. Then-Senate minority leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) tried to spin the Senate’s April 2001 shift of \$300 billion from Bush’s tax cut to education and other spending as a victory for Democratic moderation. In reality, the final product—a \$1.3 trillion tax cut tilted to the rich—actually matched the tax cut Bush campaigned for before he upped the price tag to \$1.6 trillion after taking office.

“If [the ‘moderates’] go along with the repeal of the inheritance tax and big cuts in the top income tax brackets for the wealthy,” E. J. Dionne wrote in the *Washington Post*, “you’ll know the definition of a moderate: a conservative who lacks [right-wing Republican Representative] Tom DeLay’s guts or candor.”⁹

The liberals: The living dead?

If the Democratic so-called centrists have rolled over for Bush, the liberals—both inside the party and those who lead Democratic base groups such as unions and feminist organizations—have seemed paralyzed since Bush stole the election. Bush is lining up in his crosshairs everything they supposedly hold dear, yet they seem able to do little more than issue press releases. Some, concluding that nothing can be done with Bush in the White House, have backed off their previous commitments. For instance, Service Employees International Union president Andy Stern and liberal senator Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) have recently sounded the retreat on the goal of universal single-payer health care.¹⁰

Thomas Harrison accurately describes the liberals' state of mind:

The Democratic Party is not reformable, and it's all too obvious that the plans of [John] Sweeney, [Gloria] Steinem, [Rev. Jesse] Jackson & Co. to reform the party from within amount to little more than pious hopes. Significantly, their reaction to Gore's defeat was to attack Nader, not to blame Gore for his inability to beat a smirking, ignorant, overgrown frat boy. Liberals are mostly a dispirited and increasingly cynical bunch these days. Few of them actually believe they'll ever be able to influence the party. The editorials in liberal magazines exude a damp air of hopelessness and depression, with an occasional wan flicker of wistful fantasy ("now that the Democrats see how faithful workers, blacks, women, etc., are they'll turn left!"). Actually they assume that the mass of Americans are so right wing and hopeless that Clintonism is the best we can get.¹¹

The liberal rot goes even deeper than the liberals' fronting for Clinton during the last eight years. As liberal organizations have become little more than Washington lobbies, they have become increasingly unable to mobilize their mass memberships around any major demands. No wonder Democratic leaders, the media, and millions of Americans don't pay attention to them. No wonder conservative Republican and Clintonite Republican-lite politics seem unchallenged. The current California power crisis and the April 22 "Emergency Action for Women's Lives" in Washington, D.C., illustrate the results.

The current California power crisis provides the best example yet of the disaster that free-market ideology is wreaking on millions of ordinary people. Millions of Californians are fed up. They blame electricity suppliers (including Bush's biggest campaign contributors) for price gouging. With the state government under firm Democratic control, Governor Gray Davis and other Democrats could take strong action—like seizing California's power plants—and win massive popular support. Instead, they are more worried about maintaining a pro-business image and the campaign contributions that go with it. So they have opted for a series of half-measures that have virtually handed the state budget surplus over to the energy profiteers. A small group of dedicated activists have tried to rally public opposition to rate hikes and support for publicly owned power. Yet they don't have the resources to be able to reach and to organize the millions of Californians who could join a movement for public power. The unions, for one, could provide that sort of mass base. But they remain largely passive, unwilling to challenge Davis, even though his dithering has made the crisis much worse. As a result, a promising movement that could strike a blow against Bush and other free-market ideologues remains unorganized.

A second example involves the "Emergency Action for Women's Lives." This demonstration for abortion rights, called by the National Organization for Women (NOW) and other women's rights groups, attracted a maximum of 15,000 demonstrators. While the crowd was predominantly young and energetic—a good sign for the future of

the abortion rights movement—it was much smaller than it could have been. NOW put neither the resources nor the organizational muscle into turning out large numbers for the demonstration. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, NOW-organized demonstrations against GOP-sponsored attacks on abortion brought hundreds of thousands to the capitol. But eight years of a nominally pro-choice Democratic administration sapped NOW. It failed to mount a strong, activist campaign against the erosion of abortion rights, which accelerated during the Clinton years. NOW became little more than a Democratic Party caucus, and its active membership declined throughout the 1990s. Although it pleaded poverty when organizing for the April 22 march, NOW spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on national press ads bashing Ralph Nader on behalf of the Democrats only a few months earlier.

Only a few months into the Bush regime, a huge disconnect has opened up between the administration, its nominal opposition, and the public. An illegitimate administration is trying to push through a hard-right program that gained only minority support in the national election. The supposed opposition party—whose policies are more popular than the administration's—wings its hands. The popular organizations that could focus and mobilize the discontent that exists remain weak and demoralized. The combination of these factors gives Bush more running room than he deserves, feeding elite commentary insisting that Bush has established a "mandate."

Where's Ralph?

One figure who could rally large forces against Bush is Ralph Nader, whose Green Party run for the presidency last year won 2.7 million votes. Nader's super rallies sparked the only genuine enthusiasm for any candidate in the 2000 election campaign. Nader's anticorporate, pro-worker message would seem perfectly tailored to rally opposition to an administration that personifies everything Nader campaigned against. But since the 2000 election, Nader has been missing in action. He remained aloof from the Florida fiasco, unlike lesser-known Greens like California senate candidate Medea Benjamin. And as the Bush administration has announced its slash-and-burn policies on energy, the environment, workers' safety, and more, Nader has had little to say. Nader was even absent on an issue that he and his organizations helped to raise: opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas. When questioned, he insists that he's building the Green Party away from the media spotlight.

Meanwhile, Democrats and liberals continue to attack Nader with greater ferocity than they've managed against Bush. For the liberals, the attack on Nader keeps them from looking at problems within their own backyard. As filmmaker and Nader supporter Michael Moore put it:

Of course they hate Ralph Nader. He's an ugly reminder that they sold out a long time ago—and he didn't. Blame Nader, blame Bush, it's all part of the same distraction, to keep you from focusing on this one, very important fact: Republican arsenic or Democratic arsenic, it really is the same damn crap being forced down your throat.¹²

Whether the liberal attack has stymied Nader or not, he has been largely passive at a time when he could help to galvanize opposition to Bush and the Democrats. His passivity since November has fed a sense of disillusionment among large numbers of activists who worked for and voted for him.

Polls taken immediately before and after election day estimated that as many as one-half of potential Nader supporters held their noses and voted for Gore. For the remaining Nader supporters who didn't succumb to the "lesser evil," many felt that they were planting the seeds for a new progressive movement. As he wound up his campaign, Nader himself made the point that he was trying to build a movement that would last beyond election day. The Nader vote, as one of the campaign's slogans described it, represented a vote for hope, not for fear. Months later, with Bush in the White House, with liberals bashing Nader, and with Nader invisible, thousands of Nader activists feel demoralized, if not betrayed. Many have dropped out of political activity. The relentless Bush attack will likely revive many of them. But for the immediate period, their inactivity feeds the sense that Bush's program is sailing through with little opposition. The sooner Nader activists return to activity, the better, as Gary Younge is correct to stress:

The corporate domination of American politics cannot be undermined once every four years at election time or on television-panel discussions and on the lecture circuit. The truth is that it will take not just a party but a movement, joining together the disparate forces of labor unions, tree huggers, and pressure groups that made themselves heard at Seattle, to make complete sense of [Nader's] candidacy. Having made a difference at the polls, he must now make a difference in civil society. Only then will it be clear that the consequence of Nader's candidacy was not to derail the Democrats, but to restore democracy.¹³

What about the economy?

The major wild card in all evaluations of the shape of U.S. politics remains the U.S. economy. For more than a decade, the U.S. economic boom provided a backdrop for particular political developments. On the level of the ruling class and its politicians, it cemented the hold of U.S. free-market triumphalism at home and abroad. As the boom took hold in the mid-1990s, right-wing politics of the early 1990s—anti-immigrant agitation, government austerity, law-and-order politics—lost their hold. Meanwhile, the increasing gap between rich and poor gave greater currency to the politics of social justice—as measured by opinion polls and the growth of antiglobalization sentiment, as shown in Seattle and Quebec City. A persistent labor shortage fueled a noticeable, if insufficient, increase in union struggles at the end of the 1990s.

Today, all of that seems to be coming to an end. The reported job losses of 230,000 in April 2001 were the highest since 1990. The U.S. economy may already be in recession, despite the unexpected 2 percent growth in GDP in the first quarter of 2001 (revised later to 1.3 percent). Profits continue to fall while labor costs continue

to inch upward. Meanwhile, energy profiteering—the fruits of deregulation and industry consolidation—is hitting ordinary Americans with skyrocketing energy bills and gasoline prices. The California electricity disaster is a time bomb waiting to explode in states across the country. Already, Republicans and Bush loyalists worry that these accumulating crises could turn the Bush administration into a rerun of Jimmy Carter's rather than Ronald Reagan's administration.

The return of recession to the heart of the world system will shake up the political status quo for better and worse. Mounting layoffs can sap workers' confidence. But coming after a decade in which the rich made out like bandits while working people struggled just to keep up, class anger and resentment against the bosses could erupt in many different ways. The recent riots in Cincinnati sparked by a rash of police murders could be a harbinger of things to come. What is more, bosses that bought labor peace with improved contracts during the boom years will try to claw back wages and benefits. Recession will lay bare the underlying realities of the tattered social safety net that the boom had pushed into the background. In this recession, only about 40 percent of the unemployed will be eligible for unemployment assistance. And, for the first time since the 1930s, millions will face unemployment and poverty without a federal guarantee of a minimum standard of living—thanks to Clinton/GOP welfare reform.

At the same time, the voices that prosperity pushed to the margins—the protectionists and anti-immigrant racists—will gain a greater hearing. During a recession, politics become nastier and more sharp-edged. Much more is at stake. So the growth in right-wing forces, from Buchananites to the Ku Klux Klan, can't be ruled out.

Perspectives for socialists

The Bush spinmeisters want to make their man seem like Ronald Reagan, whose election marked a major shift to the right in the United States. Yet the conditions they face today are not those of 1981. Reagan pulled 8.3 million votes more than Carter in the 1980 election. Bush lost the popular vote and stumbled into the White House on the back of a one-vote Supreme Court majority. A recession and an energy crisis brought down Carter. These same factors might bring down Bush. But, most importantly, Reagan took office as the left of the 1960s and 1970s was burning out. Bush has taken office in a period when the broadly defined left is growing.

The movement in opposition to Bush remains in its earliest phases. Larger social forces, like organized labor, haven't yet demonstrated the will to go head-to-head with Bush. Nevertheless, the 2000 election left millions of people fighting mad. Even in the earliest days of Bush's administration, signs of popular opposition to Bush and his right-wing cohorts appeared—at the Washington protests on Inauguration Day and the April 22 pro-choice march. The movement against corporate globalization again made its presence felt in the April demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

As yet, this opposition is diffuse. And with traditional liberal leaders failing to react, it appears as an army without generals. It rises to fight around a particular issue and then disappears. A sustained fight still has to be built.

For socialists, this presents a challenging, but hopeful, terrain. If socialists take the steps to initiate small struggles today, they will find that wider layers of people will want to get involved. The new activists becoming involved in the abortion rights struggle or in the antiglobalization movement don't necessarily see the need to connect the issues that they fight around to a broader fight against Bush and the bosses. Socialists have the opportunities to help forge those links. Finally, we have to help rebuild the unions and other working-class organizations to put working-class demands at the forefront of a movement against Bush. The Reagan years were a tragedy. It's up to us to make the Bush years a farce.

1 Editorials quoted in Howard Kurtz, "Bush's first 100: Good, bad and ugly," *Washington Post*, April 30, 2001.

2 This phrase comes from a famous 1992 internal Pentagon strategy paper laying out the post-Cold War foreign policy of the U.S. during the elder Bush's administration. When the press caught wind of its contents, it outraged U.S. allies. The Pentagon then repudiated it, but continued to act on its central points. The author of the paper was Paul Wolfowitz, the number two man in the current Bush's Pentagon.

- 3 In a January 2001 Gallup poll, Americans ranked tax cuts 12th of 14 major priorities. In a February 2001 Gallup poll, tax cuts came in last of six major priorities for the Bush administration. See David W. Moore, Gallup News Service, "No change in public opinion on the desirability of tax cuts," May 1, 2001, available on their Web site at www.gallup.com.
- 4 Susan Page, "Poll shows Bush still has much work to do," *USA Today*, April 25, 2001, 1, 3.
- 5 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Bush's base backs him to the hilt," April 26, 2001, available on their Web site at <http://www.people-press.org>.
- 6 John F. Harris, "Mr. Bush catches a Washington break," *Washington Post*, May 6, 2001, B01.
- 7 Robert B. Reich, "The Democrats' pet shop," *American Prospect*, March 12–26, 2001.
- 8 "The Nader campaign and the future of American politics," *Monthly Review*, February 2001.
- 9 E. J. Dionne Jr., "Gutless moderates of the Democratic Party," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2001.
- 10 For example, see Jonathan Oberlander and Theodore R. Marmor, "The path to universal health care," in *The Next Agenda*, Robert Borosage and Roger Hickey, eds. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001), 93–126.
- 11 Thomas Harrison, "Election 2000: Infamy and hope," *New Politics*, Winter 2001.
- 12 Michael Moore, "Why don't we all just cut the crap right now," May 1, 2001, available on the Common Dreams Web site at www.commondreams.org.
- 13 Gary Younge, "Nader was right to make a stand against corporate domination of politics, even if it did let Bush win," *Guardian* (London), April 16, 2001.

The Democrats and the Bush Doctrine

The Other War Party

OF ALL THE ISSUES on which the 2004 presidential election will turn, none is likely to be more momentous than the issue of U.S. foreign policy. For the Bush administration—whose entire identity and “popularity” stems from its response to the September 11 attacks and its aura of wartime leadership—this is a no-brainer. But for those who want to remove the Bush administration from power, foreign policy will also play a decisive role.

Thousands of people who marched and demonstrated against Bush’s war signed up with various presidential campaigns, registering voters and the like in preparation for the election. Democratic presidential candidates such as former Vermont Governor Howard Dean and U.S. Representative Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio) recruited antiwar activists to their campaigns.¹

To sections of the antiwar movement, much more is at stake in November 2004 than an election. It would not be an exaggeration to say that some antiwar activists believe the very fate of humanity hangs on the rejection of Bush and the Bush Doctrine of endless war. To Carl Davidson and Marilyn Katz, authors of a widely circulated discussion paper directed at antiwar activists, this means removing the “War Party” in Washington, the “clique [that] is the principal architect of the war in Iraq and the main immediate danger to peace in the Middle East, and to any semblance of democracy or equality in the United States.” The best antiwar activists can hope for, according to Davidson and Katz, is a return to the (Democratic-led) status quo ante-Bush:

Instead in 2004 the Democrat national security platform must be an all-sided attack on the national security policy of the Bush hegemonist clique, showing how the future it proposes will make our country and the world less secure, not more secure. Far from defending our freedoms,

it will be at great cost to our liberties. Given the relation of forces, this will be mainly the critique of the multilateral Globalists—a position that is some combination of the critiques currently espoused by former Presidents Carter and Clinton and major voices of global capital like George Soros. If the progressive left is strong enough in the primaries, the overall platform will reflect some of its concerns as well, but there should be no illusions that this will be or should be an anti-imperialist position.²

Coming from activists like Davidson and Katz, with long histories of supporting Democratic candidates, these positions aren’t too surprising. But sentiment for “Anybody but Bush” is also pushing many on the left who have been critical of Democrats in the past to consider pulling the lever for whatever candidate has the greatest likelihood of ending Bush’s presidency (read: the Democrat). ZNet editor Michael Albert doesn’t come right out and endorse a Democrat, but he comes pretty close:

One post-election result we want is Bush retired. However bad his replacement may turn out, replacing Bush will improve the subsequent mood of the world and its prospects of survival. Bush represents not the whole ruling class and political elite, but a pretty small sector of it. That sector, however, is trying to re-order events so that the world is run as a U.S. empire, and so that social programs and rela-

tions that have been won over the past century in the U.S. are rolled back as well. What these parallel international and domestic aims have in common is to further enrich and empower the already super-rich and super-powerful.

Seeking international Empire means war and more war—or at least violent coercion. Seeking domestic redistribution upward of wealth and power, most likely means assaulting the economy via cutbacks and deficits, and then entreating the public that the only way to restore functionality is to terminate government programs that serve sectors other than the rich, cutting health care, social services, education, etc.³

Even Noam Chomsky, usually one of most vociferous critics of the bipartisan consensus, isn't ruling out support for the Democratic candidate in 2004. Following a recent speech at a United for Peace and Justice meeting in Massachusetts, Chomsky delivered an attack on both major parties. When an audience member asked if there was any point in replacing Bush with a Democrat, Chomsky replied: "The people running Washington happen to be a particularly dangerous crowd in a narrow spectrum." That's why antiwar activists should try to defeat Bush at the polls, he intimated. "These guys have so much power that small differences can have large consequences. This administration is recycled from the more reactionary elements of the Reagan and first Bush administrations."⁴

These appeals show the tremendous pull that voting for the lesser of two evils will have on sections of the antiwar movement (along with anyone else to the left of Bush) between now and November 2004. These positions stem from two overriding assumptions: first, that Bush and his foreign policy is so radical and threatening that he must be thrown out of office at any cost; second, that whatever the limitations of the Democratic candidate, he or she will redirect U.S. foreign policy away from Bush's aggressive and unilateral path.

This article will try to show that both of these assumptions are wrong. Bush's policy, including the Bush Doctrine promulgated in September 2002, represents a new departure in U.S. foreign policy. But it doesn't represent a fundamental break with what came before it. Second, there is nothing in the record of Democratic administrations to show that they are any less committed to pursuing and extending U.S. imperial interests than Republican administrations. What differences exist between the two parties on questions of foreign policy usually remain confined to marginal rather than central issues. If a Democratic administration took office in January 2005, no one should expect a sudden reversal of the policies that Bush—or previous administrations—set into motion.

Would President Gore have gone to war in Iraq?

To many looking forward to voting Bush out of office in 2004, it's self-evident that the Democrats would present a reasonable alternative. After all, they claim, the real winner of the 2000 presidential election, former Vice President Al Gore, would never have pushed U.S. foreign policy in the direction that Bush that has moved,

even after the 9/11 attacks. We have it on the authority of former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, whose recent article in *Foreign Affairs* criticizes Bush for trading "reliance on alliance" for "redemption through preemption." Albright continued:

I remain convinced that had Al Gore been elected president, and had the attacks of September 11 still happened, the United States and NATO would have gone to war in Afghanistan together, then deployed forces all around the country and stayed to rebuild it. Democrats, after all, confess support for nation building, and also believe in finishing the jobs we start. I also believe the United States and NATO together would have remained focused on fighting al-Qaeda and would not have pretended—and certainly would not have been allowed to get away with pretending—that the ongoing failure to capture Osama bin Laden did not matter. As for Saddam, I believe the Gore team would have read the intelligence information about his activities differently and concluded that a war against Iraq, although justifiable, was not essential in the short term to protect U.S. security. A policy of containment would have been sufficient while the administration pursued the criminals who had murdered thousands on American soil.⁵

In September 2002, Gore himself made news when he presented what was billed as a strong critique of Bush's plans to attack Iraq in a speech at San Francisco's Commonwealth Club. The *San Francisco Chronicle* called it "one of the most forceful Democratic condemnations of President Bush's foreign policy." Headlines told of the former vice president denouncing Bush's "go-it-alone, cowboy-type reaction to foreign affairs."⁶

But a closer look at both Albright's and Gore's texts shows that their criticisms of Bush are actually quite mild. At several points in Albright's *Foreign Affairs* article, she asserts a criticism of Bush only to take it back a few paragraphs later. At one point, she blasts Bush for framing U.S. policy as a "with us or against us" choice. But later in the article she writes, "We must be relentless in shaping a global consensus that terrorism is fully, fundamentally and always wrong. No exceptions, no excuses." She criticizes the Bush administration for going to war without even convincing the UN Security Council to support it. But later she adds "I personally felt the war was justified on the basis of Saddam's decade-long refusal to comply with UN Security Council resolutions on WMD." (Incidentally, that was Bush's original pretext for the war.) Albright even says "I credit Bush for his ambition and for taking political risks he did not have to take.... For the good of the United States, I hope his policies succeed. But I am left with the feeling that he has needlessly placed obstacles in this own path."⁷ Note, too, that she offers the opinion that as president Gore would have concluded that war with Iraq "was not essential *in the short term*," implying that he would not have renounced invasion, but merely delayed it. All of Albright's criticisms have the feel of someone who is still advising the president on how best to carry out administration policy.

Gore's speech follows a similar pattern of laying out a few good sound bites buried within a larger message that

wants to advise Bush about how better to go about dealing with the “threat” posed by Saddam Hussein. Gore questioned the election-year timing of Bush’s congressional resolution authorizing a war in Iraq and argued the resolution should be “narrowed.” But he added: “Nevertheless, all Americans should acknowledge that Iraq does, indeed, pose a serious threat to the stability of the Persian Gulf region, and we should be about the business of organizing an international coalition to eliminate his access to weapons of mass destruction.” Gore prodded Bush to gather a larger “international coalition” to force Iraqi compliance before taking “other options.” He also criticized the war in Iraq for its possibility to “seriously damage our ability to win the war against terrorism and to weaken our ability to lead the world in this new century.” So, in all, Gore didn’t oppose the war in Iraq in principle. He merely urged Bush to build a bigger coalition, to have a good plan for a post-war Iraq, and to focus on al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden before dealing with Saddam Hussein. In fact, Gore’s criticisms of Bush mirrored the noises coming from Bush Sr.’s advisers such as James Baker and Brent Scowcroft.

While it is impossible to answer “What would Al Gore have done?” if he had been president on 9/11, his own statements and the statements of one of the chief architects of the Clinton-Gore foreign policy suggests “not much differently.” It’s conceivable that Gore wouldn’t have pushed the confrontation with Iraq in the same way that Bush did, but it’s worth remembering that “regime change” against Iraq was official Clinton-Gore policy dating from 1998.⁸ Not only did the Clinton-Gore administration strangle Iraq for eight years with sanctions, but it also supported several attempts to foment a coup or uprising against Saddam Hussein. But liberals are willing to forget this because the Clinton-Gore administration carried out its militarist policies—such as the non-UN sanctioned NATO war in Kosovo in 1999—in a much less diplomatically clumsy way than the Bush administration does. Contrasting the fear and loathing Bush inspires in Europe with the “mourning for Clinton” in European public opinion, historian Perry Anderson comments:

Where the rhetoric of the Clinton regime spoke of the cause of international justice and the construction of a democratic peace, the Bush administration has hoist the banner of the war on terrorism. These are not incompatible motifs, but the order of emphasis assigned to each has altered. The result is a sharp contrast of atmospherics. The “war on terrorism” orchestrated by Cheney and Rumsfeld is a far more strident, if also brittle, rallying-cry than the cloying pieties of the Clinton-Albright years. The immediate political yield of each has also differed. The new and sharper line from Washington has gone down badly in Europe, where human-rights discourse was and is especially prized. Here the earlier line was clearly superior as a hegemonic idiom.⁹

To truly understand what is happening in this clash over the direction of U.S. foreign policy, it’s essential to pay attention to what the players say. Even more important is to pay attention to what they do now and what

they have done in the past. From this point of view, a different understanding of the differences between Democrats and Republicans emerges. The Bush Doctrine does indeed represent a new departure in U.S. foreign policy. But it doesn’t represent the sharp and radical break with the past that liberal Democrats would like us to imagine. If anything, the more aggressive U.S. imperial policy under Bush represents an amplification of trends in U.S. policy that the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton set into motion. In fact, atmospherics and punditry aside, there is much more continuity between Clinton and Bush II than there is discontinuity.

Before explaining in greater detail why the differences between Democrats and even the Bush Republicans aren’t as sharp as they are made out to be, it’s worth considering one fact and one example in the relationship between Clinton and his supposed arch-enemy, Bush Jr. The one fact is this: At each major opportunity in which elder statesman Clinton has had an opportunity to weigh in on Bush’s major foreign policy decisions, he has backed up Bush. In a July 2003 appearance on *Larry King Live*, Clinton exonerated Bush’s manipulation of intelligence and endorsed the war in Iraq: “People can quarrel with whether we should have more troops in Afghanistan or internationalize Iraq or whatever, but it is incontestable that on the day I left office, there were unaccounted for stocks of biological and chemical weapons.”¹⁰ What’s more, Clinton was hardly a disinterested observer of the war in Iraq. He acted as a close adviser to Bush’s partner in crime, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, throughout the buildup to war. When liberal-darling and potential future presidential contender Hillary Clinton returned from a visit to Baghdad in early December, the *New York Times*’ staunchly pro-war columnist William Safire ran a piece headlined “Hillary, congenial hawk.” In it, he quotes her stating that Bush should “stay the course” in Iraq, but that “we need more troops, and we need a different mix of troops,” echoing Republican Senator John McCain’s criticisms.¹¹

Bush’s disdain for international treaties—from the Kyoto Protocol on global warming to the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC)—is cited more than any other example of the difference between Clinton’s “multilateralism” and Bush’s “unilateralism.” Even pro-war Democrats like Senator Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) attack Bush for this. But this is another example of the pot calling the kettle black. The Clinton administration sabotaged, and then refused to sign an international treaty banning land mines. It let a biological weapons treaty languish for years. Clinton only signed the 1998 ICC treaty three weeks before he left office, essentially punting it to the Bush administration. And after working strenuously to weaken the Kyoto Protocol in two separate international conferences, the Clinton administration signed the treaty. But it refused to submit it to the Senate for ratification after senators, on a 95-0 vote in 1997, promised to reject it. It goes without saying that John Kerry, as well as former Democratic presidential candidates Senators Joe Lieberman and Bob Graham

(D-Fla.) and former Senator Carol Moseley Braun (D-Ill.) voted against the treaty.

The parties and foreign policy: A case of political kabuki

Given the fairly narrow differences between the parties on U.S. foreign policy, it's amazing that the image of sharp polarization between the parties exists. It's particularly curious in the one main policy area in which the idea of "bipartisanship" extends the farthest. One of the oldest clichés in American politics holds that "politics stops at the water's edge"—i.e. that partisan disputes aren't supposed to interfere with the conduct of American foreign policy. On the biggest, guiding questions of American foreign policy, this is certainly the case. During the Cold War, for instance, no mainstream candidate ever ran a campaign challenging the U.S. anticommunist "containment" policy against the USSR. Today, every Democrat or Republican claims to have the best strategy for fighting terrorism. But within the wider agreement on goals and aims, there is room for disagreement. This is especially true during election season, when candidates and parties accentuate even minuscule differences between them to appeal to their respective voting bases. As foreign policy analyst Andrew Bacevich puts it, "Through tacit agreement, the two major parties approach the contest for the presidency less as an opportunity for assessing U.S. policies abroad than for striking poses—a hallowed and inviolable bit of political kabuki."¹² During the 2000 election, Gore foreign policy adviser Richard Holbrooke maintained an agreement with Bush adviser Paul Wolfowitz—the intellectual author of the Bush Doctrine—to keep discussion of U.S. policy toward Indonesia and East Timor out of the presidential fray. As Holbrooke put it, "Paul and I have been in frequent touch to make sure we keep East Timor out of the presidential campaign, where it would do no good for American or Indonesian interests."¹³

When he was a presidential candidate in 1992, Bill Clinton chided George Bush Sr. for "coddling dictators" in his policy towards China. He said of Bush's policy of forcibly returning to Haiti refugees from that country's military dictatorship: "I am appalled by the decision of the Bush administration to pick up fleeing Haitians on the high seas and forcibly return them to Haiti before considering their claim to political asylum." He slammed Bush for being too slow to intervene militarily in Bosnia.¹⁴ Once in office, he reversed himself, essentially adopting Bush Sr.'s policies on these questions. In the case of Haiti, he didn't even wait until his inauguration to announce that he would maintain Bush's policy of locking up Haitian refugees in the Guantánamo Bay camp that is now serving as a gulag for accused terrorists. Clinton lifted any human rights considerations regarding trade with China as part of his policy of adopting China as a "strategic partner" with the U.S. By the end of his term, Clinton faced fire from right-wing Republicans who denounced his China policy in terms that resembled Clinton's own criticism of Bush Sr. And in Bosnia, Clin-

ton eventually make good on his plans for military intervention there, but only after trying to follow Bush Sr.'s policy for nearly three years. The so-called humanitarian intervention on behalf of Bosnia was no victory for progressives. It served as a template for greater U.S. intervention in the Balkans, and the creation of colonial administrations in Kosovo and East Timor.

Likewise, during the 2000 election campaign, George W. Bush blasted Clinton for promoting "nation building" in places like the Balkans, for over-extending the deployment of the armed forces, and for taking too soft a posture towards China, among other points. National Security Adviser-to-be Condoleezza Rice even hinted that the U.S. would pull its forces out of the Balkans because "We really don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten." After Rice's trial balloon caused outcry in Europe and in the U.S. media, Bush said he had no intention of pulling out of the Balkans. Despite its stated hostility to nation building, the Bush administration is now engaged in just such an endeavor in Afghanistan and Iraq. And with roughly half the combat power of the U.S. armed forces deployed around the world today, the U.S. military is stretched thinner than it ever was under Clinton. Finally, even before Bush decided to count China as an ally in the war on terrorism, he was backing away from his earlier bellicose rhetoric. When Chinese pilots shot down a U.S. spy plane in April 2001, Bush made a few saber rattling noises. The administration then decided to trade U.S. crewmembers for an apology to China, leaving Bush's cheerleaders in the conservative press denouncing him for appeasing China. In a front-page editorial in the right-wing *Weekly Standard*, neoconservative ideologues William Kristol and Robert Kagan denounced "the profound national humiliation that President Bush has brought upon the United States" for issuing a statement of "regret" to win release of the crew of a U.S. spy plane that collided with a Chinese fighter over the South China Sea.¹⁵

These examples show that when it comes to foreign policy, there is much more continuity between administrations—even ones staffed by different political parties—than there is a difference between them. As Bacevich notes, most differences between Democratic and Republican administrations emerge on the margins of the main questions of U.S. foreign policy. This reality makes it harder to explain the widely shared—almost common-sense—perception that Democrats are "weak on defense" (or, put more positively from a liberal point of view, "committed to peace") and that the Republicans are both "stronger" and "more professional" in their approach to foreign affairs. It forgets the fact that the Democratic administrations were the architects of the Cold War "national security state" and the policy of "containment" of the USSR. FDR and his administration set up the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the United Nations—still, today, tools of American imperialism. Besides being the only head of state to use atomic weapons, President Harry Truman also created the National Security Council, the CIA, and the Defense De-

partment. His Truman Doctrine authorized U.S. troops to intervene anywhere to “defend free enterprise” against “communism.” The mythmakers laud President John F. Kennedy for creating the Peace Corps, while ignoring that he also created the Green Berets. And he came the closest of any world leader to bringing the world to nuclear holocaust during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁶

The Democrats made their play as the architects of U.S. imperialism in a period in which “America First” isolationism still held sway over much of the Republican Party. This position held that U.S. foreign policy should be concerned only with the military defense of U.S. territory and should eschew overseas intervention or U.S. involvement in European or other regions’ affairs. Isolationist Republicans contributed to the 1920 defeat in the U.S. Senate of President Wilson’s treaty creating the League of Nations after the First World War. But when the Republicans moved back into the White House in 1952 with the victory of Dwight D. Eisenhower, they had largely accepted the Roosevelt-Truman orthodoxy. Although Eisenhower’s Secretary of State John Foster Dulles made noises about “rolling back” communism—using the U.S. military to overthrow governments in the USSR-controlled Eastern Bloc—the Eisenhower administration never really challenged the Soviet Union in its own backyard. This meant that by the mid-20th century, the two major parties in U.S. politics were fundamentally dedicated to the same imperialist agenda. As Sidney Lens wrote in 1971, “by the time Dwight D. Eisenhower was sworn in as president early in 1953, America’s global imperialism had become institutionalized—imperialism was to remain a fixed and unyielding policy, modified only in details during the next four administrations.”¹⁷

The neocons’ Democratic origins

The most serious challenge to this foreign policy consensus came in the debacle of the Vietnam War. After the 1968 Tet Offensive made clear that the war was unwinnable, not only public opinion, but also leading business executives and sectors of the military and intelligence establishments turned against the war. This growing “antiwar camp” concealed differences between those who opposed the war in principle and those who thought cutting U.S. losses in Vietnam would help the U.S. advance its business and political interests elsewhere. In 1972, Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern, backed by a segment of business executives, including cosmetics boss Max Factor III, and the CEOs of Xerox and Continental Grain, and pursuing a conscious strategy of co-opting the Left, recruited antiwar activists into his campaign.¹⁸

The bulk of U.S. business wasn’t willing to follow the McGovern backers—and neither were powerful forces inside the Democratic Party that had become accustomed to playing their assigned roles in the set-up of Cold War liberalism. The State Department had long corrupted the AFL-CIO (often mocked by leftists as the “AFL-CIA”), funneling millions in government money to a cadre of trade-union activists (many of them ex-left-

ists) who built anticommunist unions and parties throughout the Third World. The mainstream labor movement refused to back McGovern. Cold War liberal politicians, who combined liberal positions on social welfare issues with strong support for Cold War military spending, formed another piece of the Democratic establishment that rebelled against McGovern. The most prominent among these was U.S. Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson of Washington—nicknamed “the senator from Boeing”—who mounted presidential runs in 1972 and 1976 based on his “strong on defense” positions. Having abandoned McGovern, these sections of the Democratic establishment contributed to his landslide defeat in 1972—a defeat that solidified the image of the Democrats as being “soft on defense.”

All of this history is important for today. The McGovern campaign and its aftermath is the story of the origins of the “neoconservatives” that most observers today believe to be the intellectual godparents of the Bush Doctrine. Almost all of the leading figures among today’s foreign policy neocons emerged from the Scoop Jackson and “AFL-CIA” wings of the Democratic Party. They found a home in the Reaganite Republican Party that came to power launching a New Cold War with the USSR. Richard Perle, the “prince of darkness” on today’s Defense Policy Board, began his Washington career on Jackson’s staff. *The Weekly Standard’s* Bill Kristol, the co-author of *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission*, is the son of Irving Kristol, the one-time Trotskyist and editor of the formerly liberal magazine *Commentary*, and Gertrude Himmelfarb, another former liberal turned “virtuecrat.” Defense Policy Board member R. James Woolsey III, a Washington lawyer who served in the Carter administration and spent two years as Bill Clinton’s first CIA director, was one of the most fanatical supporters of the theory that Iraq was behind the 9/11 attacks. Former Iran-contra criminal Elliott Abrams, the administration’s current director of Middle East policy, is a former staffer for Jackson and a former member of Social Democrats USA,¹⁹ the organization that supplied much of the cadre of the “AFL-CIA” escapades in the Third World. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz received his introduction to Washington as a graduate assistant to his mentor, defense intellectual (and former Trotskyist) Albert Wohlstetter, who served as an adviser to Jackson.²⁰ The neocon hawks first roosted in the Committee for the Present Danger (CPD), a Washington lobby formed in the 1970s to urge an end to U.S. détente with the Soviet Union and to call for a huge increase in military spending. CPD founders Paul Nitze and Eugene V. Rostow were both Democrats who supported Reagan in 1980. Nitze, who later joined the Reagan administration, was hardly a fringe player. He was the chief author of National Security Council Directive 68, the 1950 blueprint for U.S. Cold War policy produced for the Democratic Truman administration.

Of course, these neocon hawks found kindred spirits in longtime Republican hawks like Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Never-

theless, even today's post-McGovern Democratic Party finds within its ranks people like Senators Lieberman and Graham, whose presidential campaigns hit Bush for not being tough enough in the war on terrorism. A leading propagandist for the war in Iraq was Kenneth Pollack, a former Clinton administration National Security Council official. In fact, another letterhead organization emerging from the Scoop Jackson wing of the Democratic Party, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), included among its members major figures in the Clinton-Gore administration: Les Aspin, Clinton's first defense secretary; Woolsey; current New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, Clinton's energy secretary and UN ambassador; Henry Cisneros, Clinton's housing secretary; and Lloyd Bentsen, Clinton's first treasury secretary. The CDM joined these Clintonites with such Reaganites as former UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and contra promoter Penn Kemble.²¹ The point here is that there is nothing inherently "Republican" about the neoconservatives said to be running the Bush foreign policy. U.S. imperialism is a bipartisan project, with its ideological warriors accepted in both major parties.

The Bush Doctrine

Of all the reasons that antiwar activists give for wanting to remove the Bush administration, the aggressive new Bush Doctrine heads the list. The Bush Doctrine, spelled out in the September 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States, openly proclaimed a goal of maintaining U.S. domination of the world. "Our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States," the Bush Doctrine proclaims. It enshrines the right to attack other countries the U.S. deems threatening, as Bush's introduction to the document promises: "As a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed." The Bush Doctrine is also a neoliberal manifesto. Although this aspect of the NSS grabbed fewer headlines, it represents nearly one-half of the document. "We will promote economic growth and economic freedom beyond America's shores," it proclaims, listing promotion of policies like deregulation, "low marginal tax rates," free trade and lifting of capital controls as essential parts of U.S. national security strategy. To the Bush administration, the military and economic agendas of American imperialism are fully intertwined. Today's U.S.-occupied Iraq is not only a demonstration of the Bush "preemptive war" strategy, but it is also a laboratory for the most doctrinaire neoliberal experiments, from widespread privatization to the imposition of the "flat tax."

The doctrine's brazenness and its employment in the unprovoked attack on Iraq show the Bush regime's uniquely dangerous nature, many in the antiwar movement conclude. For this reason, supporting any Democrat with a chance to beat Bush is essential. Carl Davidson and Marilyn Katz urge the antiwar movement to take advantage of the elections to target the War Party,

the clique whom they hold responsible for "war with Iraq and the radical shift in U.S. foreign policy to 'unilateral, preemptive war' launched by the Bush White House."²²

There's no doubt the Bush Doctrine has broken new ground in brazenness with which it carries out what Rumsfeld calls a "forward-leaning" policy—using U.S. military intervention in every part of the world to advance U.S. political and economic interests. Ideologues like Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and others took advantage of the post-September 11 climate to push through an aggressive militarist program that had been considered untenable only a decade before.²³ The administration has pushed up the level of military spending from about \$290 billion annually to more than \$400 billion annually in three years, accomplishing in three years the increase in military spending that Vice President Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign pledged to accomplish in ten years. Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to consider the Bush regime and its doctrine as something completely without precedent. In fact, many of the policies that now fly under the colors of the Bush Doctrine were tested or even pioneered in the previous Democratic administration of Bill Clinton.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 left the U.S. as the unassailable world superpower. This new situation left the U.S. with as much freedom of action as it could ever want. U.S. military and diplomatic planners set about preserving American primacy. Rather than deeply cutting the military budget in the face of the disappearance of its main *raison d'être*, Clinton maintained Cold War levels of military spending throughout the 1990s. Clinton dispatched U.S. troops to hot spots around the world more times than the previous four U.S. administrations combined. And ruling in the height of the high-tech boom when the U.S. economy left its main competitors behind, the Clinton administration zealously pushed the free-market, free-trade agenda. As *ISR* editor Ahmed Shawki explained,

American imperial policy in the 1990s combined two aspects: One, to reestablish the right of the U.S. to militarily intervene directly, not just through proxies. Number two, economic imperialism had to be advanced, in particular to bring in those areas of the world that had been previously dominated by the USSR and to penetrate other areas more deeply.²⁴

As Anderson notes above, the Clinton administration was diplomatically adept at cloaking its agenda of American domination in idealistic claptrap about the "international community." But it also spoke incessantly of the U.S. as the world's "indispensable nation." Its rhetoric may not have been as "unilateralist" as Bush's, but its actions set many of the precedents that Bush is now flaunting. To force a settlement in Bosnia, the U.S. launched NATO air strikes on Bosnian Serb positions in 1995. In using NATO in this way, the U.S. openly flouted the UN Security Council, which had been the forum for the Balkans policy of the U.S. and Europe up to that point. The U.S. simply asserted NATO's right to act as an arm

of the UN Security Council. Four years later, the U.S. junked even that pretext. Knowing it would face a Security Council veto from Russia and/or China, the U.S. didn't even bother to seek a UN sanction for the 1999 NATO war in Kosovo.

Economically, the U.S. exercised its might as well. When the 1997 economic crisis spread through Asia, the U.S. strong-armed Japan out of its offer to organize the bailout of major Southeast Asian countries. The U.S. insisted that only the IMF could organize the bailout. More than at any time previously, the U.S. used its influence in the world bodies like the IMF and the World Bank to force free-market, U.S.-friendly policies on countries around the world.

Although Bush would never credit his predecessor, Clinton and his administration enacted policies that the Bush administration is taking advantage of today. Rumsfeld would not be in the position to play "New Europe" against "Old Europe" had Clinton not pushed through NATO expansion in 1996 nor pursued an aggressive policy in the Balkans. The U.S. military would not have been able to topple the Taliban in a few months using air strikes and local militias had the Clinton administration not already tested this strategy in Kosovo in 1999.²⁵ Bush would not be poised to press Latin American countries into the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) had Clinton not fought for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993.

The Clinton administration also pursued policies that smacked of the world-dominating strategy of the Bush Doctrine. The watchword of the 1997 "Quadrennial Defense Review" (QDR) the main statement of an administration's military policies, was "shaping the international security environment in ways that promote and protect U.S. national interests." In other words, using the military in "forward-leaning" ways to alter the political and economic configuration of the world to conform to U.S. interests. The QDR asserted that "preventing the emergence of a hostile regional coalition or hegemon" was a chief U.S. national security goal. And the Clinton administration did not shrink from even more expansive definitions of U.S. goals. The Pentagon under Clinton sponsored *Joint Vision 2020*, a task force promoting the idea that the U.S. should strive for "full-spectrum dominance" of all possible theaters of war, from the oceans to space. Clinton authorized funding for the key weapon in this plan for global domination, the national missile defense system, a long-time goal of neoconservatives.²⁶

Finally, the colonial administrations Bush is propping up in Afghanistan and Iraq owe much to the pioneering efforts of the Clinton administration in Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor. Liberals generally welcomed these exercises in colonialism as examples of "humanitarian intervention." One of the leading neoconservative ideologues, Max Boot, paid a backhanded compliment to Clinton when he urged imperial conquest "'for the good of the natives," a phrase that once made progressives snort in derision, but may be taken more seriously after the Left's conversion (or rather, reversion) in the 1990s to the cause

of 'humanitarian' interventions."²⁷

Of all mainstream commentators, Andrew Bacevich is the most clear-sighted of those analyzing the continuity of Clinton and Bush policies. Writing a review of the NSS that announced the Bush Doctrine, he explains:

Throughout the Clinton era, U.S. military forces marched hither and yon, intervening in a wider variety of places, for a wider variety of purposes than at any time in our history. More often than not, once the troops arrived, they stayed. As a result, by the time that Clinton left office in 2001, the defining fact of international politics—albeit one vigorously denied by the outgoing administration—had become not openness and not globalization but the emergence of a Pax Americana.

The Bush administration doesn't share the Clinton administration's "ambivalence" about using military force, he writes. It wants to lead with its mailed fist. Nevertheless,

The Bush administration's grand strategy reeks of hubris. Yet one may also detect in its saber-rattling occasional notes of desperation. America today is, by any measure, the most powerful nation on earth, enjoying a level of mastery that may exceed that of any great power or any previous empire in all of history. Yet to judge by this extraordinary document [the NSS], we can not rest easy, we can [not] guarantee our freedom or our prosperity until we have solved every problem everywhere, relying chiefly on armed force to do so. In the end, we have little real choice—as the similarities between this new strategy and the Clinton strategy that Republicans once denounced with such gusto attest. In truth, whatever their party affiliation or ideological disposition, members of the so-called foreign policy elite cannot conceive of an alternative to "global leadership"—the preferred euphemism for global empire.²⁸

2004 Democratic critique of Bush

In the 2002 mid-term elections, the Democrats insisted that they would run on a critique of Bush's domestic agenda and avoid a battle with the president over the conduct of foreign policy. This was at a time when Bush deliberately pushed the congressional resolution authorizing war in Iraq to shape the midterm elections around "his" issue—the war on terrorism. This Democratic non-strategy turned out to be a loser. As liberal foreign policy commentator William Hartung explained after the November 2002 elections,

As for the Democrats, their leadership badly misplayed what admittedly was a difficult hand. The notion that granting the president his war resolution would somehow take the war issue off the table and clear the way for discussion of domestic issues, which were considered the Democratic Party's strong suit, was a colossal miscalculation. Not only did it give voters concerned about the war nowhere to turn on election day—depressing turnout in the process—but the national Democratic Party never even bothered to craft an alternative domestic agenda. Not only was there no equivalent of the ten-point "Contract With America" that helped Republicans seize control of the house in the 1994 midterm elections, there was no plan at all.²⁹

The Democrats ended up with the worst of both

worlds. Those who supported Bush—including Senators Kerry, Lieberman and John Edwards (D-N.C.) and Representative Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.)—found themselves lending legitimacy to a war policy that most rank-and-file Democrats opposed. Those who fell silent on the war in order to campaign on prescription drug benefits and the like had nothing to offer millions who were then besieging congressional offices with letters, e-mails, and phone calls opposing the war. As a result, discouraged Democratic voters stayed home and Bush claimed a major victory for his war on terrorism policy. Given their pathetic showings—on both foreign and domestic agendas—the Democrats were lucky to have confined their losses to only five House seats and two Senate seats.

As the field of Democratic presidential hopefuls shaped up, a new orthodoxy on foreign policy took shape. Determined not to let the White House paint them as “weak on defense,” all Democratic contenders heeded the pundits’ calls to put forth “credible” foreign policy positions.³⁰ Decorated Vietnam vet John Kerry even tried to steal a page from Bush’s playbook—launching his campaign in front of the USS *Yorktown* stationed in South Carolina. The entrance into the Democratic presidential field of Ret. Gen. Wesley Clark was aimed, according to Clark’s supporters, at showing voters that Democrats are so “strong on defense” that they’ll follow an ex-general.

Pro-military posturing aside, what is the Democratic critique of Bush? In the statements from leading Democrats like Gore and Albright, in the advice offered to the Democratic Party in the pages of foreign policy specialist journals and in the stump speeches and position papers of the candidates themselves, a few major themes emerge. These main themes, plus a sampling of the supporting rhetoric follows below.

The Bush administration’s focus on Iraq and the “axis of evil” has diverted resources from the main battle: the war on terrorism. Madeleine Albright: “The Bush administration’s decision to broaden its focus from opposing al-Qaeda to invading Iraq and threatening military action against others has had unintended and unwelcome consequences.”³¹ Howard Dean: “Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden used our loss of focus to rebuild their terrorist networks, as recent attacks in Saudi Arabia and Morocco demonstrate.”³²

The Bush administration has needlessly antagonized allies. Clinton UN official Suzanne Nossel: “If the U.S. had led the way into the UN [during the debate over the Iraq war], it could have gotten terms and a timeline suiting its needs. With the threat of unilateral action whispered, rather than shouted, other countries would have gotten the point without feeling compelled to counter the saber rattling.”³³ John Kerry: “The administration has tried to focus NATO on the Middle East, but its high-handed treatment of our European allies, on everything from Iraq to the Kyoto climate change treaty, has strained relations nearly to the breaking point.”³⁴

*The Bush administration has failed to “finish what it has started,” from capturing Osama bin Laden to rebuilding Iraq.*³⁵

Al Gore: “Great nations persevere and then prevail. They do not jump from one unfinished task to another. We should remain focused on the war against terrorism.”³⁶ Joe Lieberman: “After seeing how the administration allowed post-Taliban Afghanistan to regress into violence and instability, I warned that without a strong reconstruction strategy, post-war Iraq could degenerate into chaos. I offered detailed proposals on how to secure the peace after Saddam’s ouster, and urged President Bush to come forward with a plan of his own.”³⁷

The Bush administration has short changed homeland security. Wesley Clark: “The Homeland and Economic Security Fund would invest \$40 billion over two years to directly fund jobs that immediately improve our security. The Bush administration has short changed vital areas of homeland security. The Council on Foreign Relations released a bipartisan study this summer that said that the nation is dramatically underfunding efforts to prepare police, fire and ambulance personnel for terrorist attacks. This fund would improve our defenses against a terrorist attack by paying to train more firefighters and police officers, hire more Coast Guard, customs service, and law enforcement personnel.”³⁸ Howard Dean: “If we can spend \$400 billion to defend our nation from threats abroad, as we must, should we not spend more to defend our nation at home?”³⁹

The Bush administration has departed from long-standing U.S. principles, making it difficult to wield the “soft power” of the U.S. in the world. John Kerry: “The Bush administration has a plan for waging war but no plan for winning the peace. It has invested mightily in the tools of destruction but meagerly in the tools of peaceful construction. It offers the peoples in the greater Middle East retribution and war but little hope for liberty and prosperity.”⁴⁰ Dana Allin, Philip Gordon, and Michael O’Hanlon: “A negative image of the United States weakens alliances, increases resistance to U.S. policy, and, at worst, expands the available pool of potential recruits for terrorism.”⁴¹

This sampling reveals a Democratic critique that stands well within the bounds of acceptable ruling-class debate about the relationship of the U.S. to the world. None of these leading Democratic candidates or spokespeople challenges the assumption that the U.S. should be anything but the number one military and economic power in the world. They don’t object to the reality of U.S. empire. They object to the Bush administration’s unseemly trumpeting of U.S. imperial aims. Despite their increased willingness to criticize the U.S. occupation of Iraq as it has unfolded into a disaster, none of them calls for an end to the occupation in Iraq or for an end to intervention in Afghanistan. In fact, all of them call for an increased troop presence in Iraq—preferably staffed with NATO, UN, or other foreign troops. Their critiques of Bush are couched within a broader case that they, rather than Bush, hold the key to “restoring American leadership” of the world. Even their critiques of Bush’s policy of preemptive war don’t reject the concept out-of-hand. Dean, the candidate who made his name by opposing Bush’s war in Iraq, said in a major foreign pol-

icy speech: “In November 2004, the American people will seek a president who is prepared to use our brave and remarkable armed forces, as I would, to defend against any actual or imminent threat to ourselves or our friends and allies.”⁴² Dean has also refused to rule out the preemptive use of military force to disarm Iran and North Korea, a position he developed in consultation with Danny Sebright, a former Defense Department official in the Bush II administration.⁴³ Finally, Dean endorses the neocon’s dream program, the Star Wars missile defense system, and opposes a proposed ban on placing weapons in space.⁴⁴

There are many subsidiary points of the Democratic critique of Bush—from his failing on issues like global warming and AIDS to a “lack of engagement” in the Israel-Palestine peace process. But the points listed above are the main themes around which the “top-tier” Democratic contenders will coalesce. One could object that the focus here on the top-tier candidates and leading establishment figures like Gore and Albright automatically produces the mildest Democratic critique of Bush. True enough. The platform that Rep. Dennis Kucinich proposes in his “Ten Point Program”—abolition of NAFTA and the World Trade Organization, multibillion-dollar cuts in the military budget, repealing the USA PATRIOT Act, the creation of a Department of Peace, U.S. support for global treaties and so on—stands far to the left of anything Democratic establishment figures quoted above would propose. But while Kucinich might win support from many in the antiwar movement for these positions, his campaign is not really aimed at winning the Democratic nomination. Instead, he wants to give progressives the idea that some Democrats actually care about what they think—only to make it easier for progressives to back a Dean, a Kerry, or a Gephardt. On this, Kucinich is very clear, recently telling the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: “The Democratic Party created third parties by running to the middle. What I’m trying to do is to go back to the big tent so that everyone who felt alienated could come back through my candidacy.”⁴⁵

Would a Democrat in the White House make a difference?

If one takes the Democrats at their word, a Democrat taking the Oval Office in 2004 might change the style of U.S. foreign policy, but not the substance. This is so for two reasons. First, none of the leading contenders has promised a radical break with Bush’s policies. Second—and more importantly—powerful forces would push a Democratic administration to continue many of Bush’s policies whether it wanted to or not.

At the most basic level, a change in administrations will not change the military and industrial bureaucracies with a vested interest in promoting and extending an aggressive U.S. foreign policy. Pentagon projects and arms contracts extend over years and outlast administrations. The officer corps and the vast military bureaucracy remain largely unchanged even when civilian administrations change. This promotes continuity in military poli-

cies across administrations—as well as inertia and challenges to civilian authority. The Clinton years witnessed what Bacevich calls “the rise of the pro-consuls,” where “On an ever-widening array of foreign-policy issues—where the U.S. should engage, how and for what purposes—the military functioned as an independent and powerful policy advocate that civilian officials ignored at their peril.”⁴⁶ Regional Commanders In Chief (CINCs)—like Generals Tommy Franks and John Abizaid, the two most recent Central Command CINCs—exercise more political power in making U.S. foreign policy than any group of officers since the 1940s.

For the foreseeable future, any U.S. administration will inherit a geopolitical environment in which the U.S. spends more on its military than the rest of the world combined. The U.S. economy remains the world’s largest. So the U.S. will retain the ability to bully and bribe other nations to follow its demands. And no American administration dedicated to defending the interests of the American ruling class will ever voluntarily renounce the power it has. As Joseph Nye, a top Democratic foreign policy hand critical of Bush’s unilateralism, admitted: “No large country can afford to be purely multilateralist, and sometimes the United States must take the lead by itself, as it did in Afghanistan. And the credible threat to exercise the unilateral option was probably essential to getting the UN Security Council to pass Resolution 1441, which brought the weapons inspectors back into Iraq.”⁴⁷ During her stint as UN ambassador, Albright echoed Nye when she told the UN Security Council: “We will act multilaterally when we can, unilaterally when we must.”

The Bush administration took advantage of September 11 to attain longstanding (and bipartisan) U.S. strategic goals, such as increasing U.S. hegemony in the Middle East and projecting U.S. power and influence into Central Asia, the heart of the former Soviet Empire. Now that the Pentagon has increased its “footprint” around the world, no U.S. administration is about to retreat if it doesn’t have to. In launching the war on terrorism, Washington has guaranteed that regions across the world will face years of turmoil. Other nations will take steps to counteract Washington’s more aggressive stance:

The most unnerving reality facing a new U.S. administration may be the fact that it could be too late to roll back the Bush administration’s aggressive policy because now other countries are emulating that policy. How could a new administration withdraw from Central Asia knowing that locals who reject the U.S. presence would construe it as victory and that other regional powers, most notably Russia and China, would attempt to increase their military and economic influence there? How could an administration withdraw from Iraq with dozens of U.S. companies already having contracts valued in the billions of dollars? Most ominously, how could a new administration leave so many power vacuums around the globe?⁴⁸

These rhetorical questions answer themselves. No U.S. administration dedicated to upholding and defending “U.S. interests”—that is, the interests of U.S. busi-

ness and the ruling class—could ever *voluntarily* retreat from all of these challenges. And any administration will assume control over a national security establishment whose understanding of the range of options available to it has already been stretched by the Bush Doctrine and the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

All of this suggests that a Democratic administration might make some small changes—like lifting the global “gag rule” against U.S. aid to international agencies that offer family planning advice. But it would not alter the direction or substance of U.S. foreign policy. So what would become of the Bush Doctrine of preemptive war, regime change, and promotion of free-market capitalism around the world? Most likely, they would be honored in the breach. As previous administrations waged unprovoked invasions that affected regime change (Grenada, 1983; Panama, 1989; Haiti, 1994; Kosovo, 1999), a future Democratic administration might do the same without attaching the label of doctrine to it. Albright advises just such a course: “It would be helpful now if the doctrine of preemption were to disappear quietly from the U.S. national security lexicon and be returned to reserve status.”⁴⁹ Note that Albright doesn’t say the U.S. has no right to act preemptively. She just thinks the U.S. shouldn’t be so quick to pull the preemption trigger.

Approaching the question from a different angle

Writing in the midst of the First World War, the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin produced the book *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism*. Lenin wanted to grasp the underlying social and economic factors that led the world’s capitalist states into world war. Previous generations of socialists, like the so-called “Pope of Marxism,” Karl Kautsky, tended to view imperialism and war as an aberration from the generally peaceful development of capitalism. They tended to see imperialism simply as a policy pursued by the governments, reflecting the interests of the most backward sections of the ruling class (the militarists and big landowners). Other capitalists, those who depended on international markets, were seen as opposing this policy of imperialism as being counterproductive to the development of capitalism.

Lenin broke with this view, arguing that imperialism wasn’t a policy that changed with the change of governments in the central powers. Imperialism was an inherent part of how modern capitalism operated. Capitalism is a competitive economic system in which units of capital first compete on a national level, and then on an international level. They not only compete among themselves inside a country, but they compete against each other internationally for labor power, markets, raw materials, and investment opportunities.

Even if we knew nothing about the mainstream candidates running for president in 2004, the Marxist understanding of imperialism would tell us why the main thrust and direction of U.S. foreign policy won’t change if Bush is tossed out of the White House. As the exposi-

tion of the Democratic critique of Bush here has shown, a Democratic administration may reflect ruling-class desires for a “kinder, gentler” imperialism. But it would be dedicated to imperialism just the same. While many “Anybody But Bush” proponents in the antiwar movement would concede this, they are willing to look the other way. Unfortunately, this is not only incorrect, but it can also have damaging consequences for building an opposition to U.S. militarism. Bill Clinton’s ability to sell his overseas adventures with the rhetoric of human rights and the international community dampened opposition that needed to be built.

The Bush Doctrine has placed before the massive antiwar opposition the challenge of combating imperialism and colonialism. It’s understandable that many mobilized in this opposition would want to get rid of Bush in 2004. But trading one imperialist politician for another isn’t a step forward. The challenge that Lenin faced—that of tackling imperialism at its roots in the capitalist system—is ours today.

- 1 U.S. Labor Against War founding member Bob Muhlenkamp joined Howard Dean’s staff, and Dennis Kucinich was the only candidate with an organizational presence at the United for Peace and Justice national conference held in Chicago in June 2003.
- 2 Carl Davidson and Marilyn Katz, “Moving from protest to politics: Dumping Bush’s regime in 2004,” available online at <http://www.noiraqwar-chicago.org>.
- 3 Michael Albert, “Election plan?” *ZNet*, August 12, 2003, available online at <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=41&ItemID=4041>.
- 4 Victoria Griffith, “The preacher: Noam Chomsky,” *Financial Times*, August 7, 2003.
- 5 Madeleine K. Albright, “Bridges, bombs or bluster,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003, 5.
- 6 See “Text: Gore assails Bush’s Iraq policy,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 2002; Carla Marinucci and John Wildermuth, “Gore blasts Bush’s ‘cowboy’ Iraq policy,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 24, 2002.
- 7 Albright, 11, 16.
- 8 See Stephen F. Hayes, “Democrats for regime change,” *Weekly Standard*, September 16, 2002.
- 9 Perry Anderson, “Force and consent,” *New Left Review* 17 (September–October, 2002), available online at <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25101.shtml>.
- 10 Clinton quoted in Matthew Riemer, “Bush and Clinton: Birds of a feather,” *Yellow Times*, July 24, 2003, available online at <http://www.yellowtimes.org>.
- 11 William Safire, “Hillary, congenital hawk,” *New York Times*, December 9, 2003.
- 12 Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 200.
- 13 Holbrooke was the Carter administration’s ambassador to Indonesia, a post that went to Wolfowitz when the Reagan administration took over in 1981. Essentially, Holbrooke and Wolfowitz acted as a tag-team in running U.S. policy toward East Timor and the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia throughout the 1970s and 1980s. See Tim Shorrock, “Paul Wolfowitz, Reagan’s man in Indonesia, is back at the Pentagon,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February, 2001.
- 14 See Lance Selfa, *Bill Clinton: A Record of Broken Promises* (Chicago: Bookmarks, 1996), 10, and Paul D’Amato and Lance Selfa, *The 1992 Elections: Is Bill Clinton the Lesser Evil?* (Chicago: Bookmarks, 1992), 8–9.
- 15 See William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “A national humiliation,” *Weekly Standard*, April 16–23, 2001, pp. 11–17, available online at <http://www.newamericancentury.org/china-20010416.pdf>.
- 16 Sherry Wolf reviews the Democrats’ history as a party of imperialism and war in “The Democrats and war: Not a lesser evil,” *International*

- Socialist Review* 26 (November/December 2002): 39–46.
- 17 Sidney Lens, *The Forging of the American Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2003), 379.
 - 18 See Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rodgers, *Right Turn* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 31, 37, on the McGovern campaign.
 - 19 See Political Research Associates' dossier on Social Democrats USA, online at http://www.publiceye.org/research/Group_Watch/Entries-118.htm. This is a fascinating look at the connections between the right wing of the AFL-CIO and the neoconservative establishment.
 - 20 For background on the neoconservatives, see Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet, "The Strategist and the Philosopher," June 2, 2003, online at <http://www.counterpunch.org/frachon06022003.html>. This article was originally published in *Le Monde*, April 16, 2003, translated by Norman Madarasz. On the connections between the neocons and radicals, see John B. Judis, "Trotskyism to anachronism: The neoconservative revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1995, available online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19950701fare-viewessay5058/john-b-judis/trotskyism-to-anachronism-the-neoconservative-revolution.html>.
 - 21 For more on the CDM, see http://www.publiceye.org/research/Group_Watch/Entries-26.htm. In an even more bizarre connection between these right-wing Democrats and the current crop running Bush's foreign policy, CDM housed the offices of "Team B," a right-wing cabal that George Bush Sr. set up inside the CIA to provide intelligence intended to undermine President Ford's détente plans with the Soviet Union. Team B fed back-channel information to then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that helped Rumsfeld sink SALT I negotiations. Many observers today say that Rumsfeld's current "Office of Special Plans" is modeled on Team B—a connection that isn't so far-fetched when you consider that Wolfowitz was a member of Team B.
 - 22 Davidson and Katz.
 - 23 Wolfowitz was the chief author of the 1992 Defense Policy Guidance document that anticipated the Bush Doctrine's central themes: "we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power." When word of this document leaked to the New York Times, it caused a scandal that led the Pentagon and the Bush Sr. administration to repudiate it. See Michael T. Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 100–104.
 - 24 Ahmed Shawki, "Turning point for U.S. imperialism," *International Socialist Review* 26 (November–December 2002): 37.
 - 25 Andrew J. Bacevich, "Not-so-special operation: Bush adopts the Clinton way of war" *National Review*, November 19, 2001, available online at <http://www.nationalreview.com>.
 - 26 See Rahul Majahan, *Full Spectrum Dominance* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 9, 51–54.
 - 27 Max Boot, "The case for an American empire," *Weekly Standard*, October 15, 2001, 27. For more detailed discussion of the new colonialism see Lance Selfa, "A new colonial age of empire?" in *International Socialist Review* 23 (May–June 2002): 50–57.
 - 28 Andrew J. Bacevich, "Bush's grand strategy," September 29, 2002, available online at <http://www.comw.org>.
 - 29 William Hartung, "Elections and the war," November 20, 2002, available online at <http://www.commondreams.org/views02/1120-05.htm>.
 - 30 No matter what they propose, Democrats will face an onslaught from the White House and GOP attack machine. In 2002, the pro-war Georgia Senator Max Cleland, who lost three limbs in Vietnam, lost reelection in the face of GOP charges that he was "unpatriotic" because he refused to support Bush's plans to gut union rules in setting up the Department of Homeland Security. Advertising their military bona fides or even nominating Clark will not insulate them from the kind of attack Cleland faced.
 - 31 Albright, 5.
 - 32 Howard Dean, "Restoring American Leadership: A New Direction for American Foreign Policy," text prepared for presentation, Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., June 25, 2003, available online at <http://www.DeanforAmerica.com>.
 - 33 Suzanne Nozell, "Battle hymn of the Democrats." *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 27 (1) (Winter/Spring 2003), 78.
 - 34 John Kerry, "Foreign policy speech at Georgetown University," January 23, 2003, available online at <http://www.johnkerry.com>.
 - 35 Richard A. Gephardt, "American engagement and the war against terror," remarks as prepared for delivery to San Francisco Bar Association, July 22, 2003, available online at <http://www.dick-gephardt2004.com>.
 - 36 Marinucci and Wildermuth.
 - 37 Joe Lieberman, "Bush's failure in Iraq," *Boston Globe*, May 19, 2003, available online at <http://www.joe2004.com>.
 - 38 "General Wesley K. Clark announces bold job creation plan to reverse three years of failed Bush policies," September 24, 2003, available online at <http://www.clark04.com/speeches/002/>.
 - 39 Dean.
 - 40 Kerry.
 - 41 Dana H. Allin, Philip H. Gordon, and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "The Democratic Party and foreign policy," *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2003), p. 11. The authors are liberal foreign policy wonks who urge the Democrats to embrace the "common-sense, nationalist liberalism of British Prime Minister Tony Blair," 12.
 - 42 Dean.
 - 43 Charles Knight, "As Baghdad falls Howard Dean folds back into the national security establishment," April 14, 2003, available online at <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0414-09.htm>.
 - 44 Nick Anderson, "Presidential candidates detail their national security beliefs," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 2003.
 - 45 Kucinich quoted in Howie Hawkins, "For a Green presidential campaign in 2004," presented at Regional Greens Meeting, Freeville, N.Y., June 28, 2003.
 - 46 Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 170.
 - 47 Joseph Nye, "U.S. power and strategy after Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2003, 69.
 - 48 Matthew Riemer, "Would an incoming Democratic administration be forced to maintain the Bush Doctrine?" *Power and Interest News Report*, July 30, 2003, available online at <http://www.pinr.com>.
 - 49 Albright, 18.

3 The Left and the Democratic Party

Can the Left Take Over
the Democratic Party?

Why is There No Alternative?

Can the Left Take Over the Democratic Party?

EDITOR'S NOTE: These last two articles were originally written in 1988 and have been left substantially unchanged. Although much has changed since then, there are still enough similarities in the issues discussed here to be relevant today. A case in point: The Democratic Socialists of America—which counts among its most prominent members AFL-CIO President John Sweeney—issued this grudging endorsement of John Kerry on July 23, 2004: “Kerry was hardly the first choice of our members. Most supported Dennis Kucinich or Howard Dean in the Democratic primary elections and would be very critical of Senator Kerry’s voting record on

trade issues, as well as his support for the resolution authorizing the use of force in Iraq; but the most important concern of our members now is to defeat Bush,” said Frank Llewellyn, the National Director of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). This shows that even with the passage of 16 years, DSA strategies haven’t changed much from what is described below.

More important is the consideration of the Rainbow Coalition. Although one can see similarities between Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition campaigns and Dennis Kucinich’s run in 2004, Jackson actually gained far greater support than Kucinich. Therefore, the Rainbow Coalition

actually posed a more serious possibility of “the Left taking over the Democratic Party” than any progressive effort in the last 25 years. Therefore, it makes sense to review the history of the Rainbow Coalition to see that even in circumstances where progressives seemed to have greater leverage against the Democratic leadership, the end results were no different from Kucinich’s feeble campaign. Also, it’s worth noting that since mounting his “insurgent” campaigns in the 1980s, Jackson has become one of the Democratic Party’s most reliable canvassers for the party’s candidates, no matter how conservative.

AT FIRST GLANCE, the attraction of “lesser evilism” today seems even more unfounded than at any time since the Second World War. The Democrats, concerned that the party is losing ground to conservatives, have decided that the best road back to the White House is to ape the Republicans. As Truman took up the banner of anti-communism in 1948 and as Kennedy campaigned for a stronger military in 1960, today’s Democrats desire to prove that they can implement Reagan-like policies more efficiently than the Republicans.

In September 1986, the party announced the principles on which it would run its 1986 and 1988 election campaigns. The document, called “New Choices for a Changing America” emphasized the need for a strong military, a “commitment to stronger families,” labor/management partnerships, and support for small business “entrepreneurship.” The manifesto refused to criticize Reagan administration attacks on Nicaragua and Libya. It refused to take a stand on abortion or on gay and lesbian rights. Gone were even the ritual on-paper commitments to “full employ-

ment” that have accompanied most Democratic policy statements since the New Deal.

The statement should be viewed, a Democratic official said, as an effort “to get out from under the false image that Democrats are weak on defense, have weird lifestyles and are big taxers and spenders.”¹ Conservative “neo-liberalism” is the reigning orthodoxy in the Democratic Party today. The Democrats desire to portray themselves as a party of the broad middle class, shorn of “special interests” like labor and Blacks.

This means that many of the liberal activists who act as the Democrats’ foot soldiers in the primaries and in get-out-the-vote drives should find even fewer reasons to work for the Democrats. One has to wonder where the opening to anti-intervention activists can be found in a party whose election principles declared: “After the brutal Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian hostage crisis and the signs of unrest in Central America, [the American people] knew America’s defenses had to be repaired.” Where will nuclear freeze activists find a hearing in a party which proclaimed: “Democrats harbor no illusions

about arms control”?² Perhaps more clearly than since the late 1940s the Democratic Party has demonstrated its desire to silence the discussion of even liberal policy alternatives.

Some on the left have accepted the neo-liberal agenda as the only way to defeat the Republicans.³ But others point out that workers’ interests are not represented in the two-party system because the U.S. lacks a social democratic or labor party that workers can call their own. They conclude that the left should take the first steps to build such a party today. The most influential strategies to create a “new social democracy” are the “realignment” strategy of the Left’s largest organization, the Democratic Socialists of America, and the “inside/outside” strategy exemplified by the Rainbow Coalition of the 1980s.

“Realignment” and the Democratic Socialists of America

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) was formed in 1982 with the intent of participating “as part of the left wing of the Democratic Party, in order to change this party itself, to turn it into a new kind of mass party.”⁴ DSA views the Democratic Party as a coalition of popular voting blocs—women, labor, Blacks, farmers—not bound by any principles. DSA believes it should work to strengthen the party’s “progressive” elements. DSA hopes that one day it can grasp the party’s leadership, which would put its supporters in a position to enact a policy of social reform. In theory, “capturing” the party in this way would drive the conservatives out, leaving the realigned Democratic Party as something approximating a European-style labor party.⁵

There are a number of problems with this approach. Above all, the DSA strategy is flawed because it is based on an incorrect assessment of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party is fundamentally a capitalist party, which means that capitalist interests—and not “progressive” voting blocs—really set the Democratic Party’s agenda. The big business interests who finance the party have never allowed any serious attempts to implement party platform planks such as those calling for the repeal of Taft-Hartley or for the establishment of a national health service. DSA’s attempts to influence the party platform and to support “progressive” candidates committed (on paper, at least) to those policies often leads activists to frustration.

DSA maintains a profile of what it calls the “left-wing of the possible” in the Democratic Party. But, in today’s Democratic Party, increasingly conservative ideas and policies have become “the possible,” and politics represented in DSA have shifted to the right as well. The reason for the shift is simple. It is the logical extension of DSA’s view of the Democrats as the “lesser evil” to the Republicans. If you believe that pressuring the people who run the Democratic Party is the way to build socialism, then you must constantly water down your criticism of them. It is the only way that Democratic kingpins will be convinced that you have “serious”—rather

than “extreme”—ideas to offer. And if you believe that any Democrat is better than any Republican, then you should be willing to support even the most conservative Democrat.

In 1984, most DSA leaders backed Walter Mondale, despite the fact that Mondale ran one of the most conservative Democratic campaigns since the Second World War. At the rank-and-file level, however, the organization split three ways, with significant support within the organization for each of the major Democratic candidates—Mondale, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and Senator Gary Hart (D-Colo.) The same happened in 1987 when a poll of the organization showed 51 percent supported Jackson for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination, 20 percent supported Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), and 15 percent supported no candidate. Instead of maintaining a “social democratic” pole within the party, the DSA now reflects the divisions within the party itself.⁶ Instead of influencing the Democrats, the Democrats have influenced DSA.

DSA often cites prominent Democrats’ and labor leaders’ endorsements of its positions as indications of its “influence” in shaping the Democratic Party’s policy debate. However, the willingness of politicians and labor leaders to endorse elements of the DSA program should not be confused with influence in the party or in the labor movement. As is more often the case, DSA attempts to rally support for whatever “progressive” programs Democratic liberals concoct. What’s more, one has only to view the records of some self-identified DSA endorsers to see that quite often their commitment to “socialism” flags when they are forced to transform their words into action.

Perhaps the best example was former International Association of Machinists (IAM) President William Winpisinger, a leading DSA figure who described himself as a “seat-of-the-pants” socialist. Winpisinger voices support for more liberal policies than most of the AFL-CIO hierarchy. On the other hand, his performance as president of a major AFL-CIO union has differed little from the performance of any other conservative trade union official. He has publicly opposed the demands of women for more union leadership positions. And he has condemned reform campaigns within some of the most top-heavy and corrupt unions like the Teamsters and the United Steel Workers unions. Winpisinger has supported union resolutions criticizing the AFL-CIO’s anti-communist foreign policy. But as a member of the federation’s executive council, he has done nothing to cut ties between the U.S. government and the federation’s American Institute for Free Labor Development—the organization which carries out the AFL-CIO’s reactionary policy overseas.

At the same time, he has urged machinists to accept widespread concessions in the airline industry. During the 1981 Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), Winpisinger urged IAM members only “to behave like good trade-unionists” rather than to lead them onto picket lines in support of PATCO. If IAM members had struck, the PATCO strike would not have

been the crushing defeat for labor that it was. Winpisinger often decries “Reaganism.” But he failed to act in a case in which his leadership might have defeated one of “Reaganism’s” first assaults against the working class.⁷

How can someone like Winpisinger, as well as many of the liberal Democrats that are DSA members, act in ways that seem so antithetical to any socialist principles? Two positions fundamental to DSA are at the root of the problem: its conception of socialism and its conception of socialist organization.

DSA accepts a view of socialism like that of European social democracy. In fact, DSA belongs to the Socialist International, the world organization of social democratic parties set up as an anti-communist front in 1951. Its members include the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, and even the Israeli Labor Party. Social democrats or reformists view socialism as arriving through a series of reforms enacted in parliament or Congress. Hence, its chief goal is to elect a social democratic party to office.

Since social democracy relies on workers’ votes in elections, it divides workers’ political action between “politics” and “economics.” For social democrats, political action (specifically, winning elections) always dominates. “Economic” struggles (like the PATCO strike) that “alienate” public opinion and damage electoral respectability must, therefore, be curtailed. To reformists, it matters little that victories of these “economic” struggles build the working class’s self-confidence and can force the bosses to grant reforms. Winpisinger’s actions during the PATCO strike—doing nothing to organize workers to defeat Reagan on the picket line and then calling for workers to defeat Reagan at the polls—is a perfect demonstration of how “democratic socialism” works in practice.

Many DSA activists criticized Winpisinger as they criticize DSA-member Democratic politicians when their political compromises conflict with DSA priorities. But DSA’s principles, which support a multi-tendenced socialist organization, leave no way to hold these members accountable for their actions. Some may argue that such organizational principles promote a healthy diversity of opinions in DSA. On the contrary, such principles undermine internal democracy. If leading DSA figures can act against the democratically-determined positions of the organization and the wishes of the majority of members—and the most basic socialist principles—how can it be said that DSA members control their own organization? At the same time, how can it be said that DSA has any influence with prominent Democrats whose actions show that, in reality, they care little about what DSA thinks?

DSA’s 1987 endorsement of Jackson highlighted another problem with DSA’s approach: its organizing around explicitly socialist politics always takes a back seat to its willingness to provide foot soldiers for Democratic election campaigns. DSA leaders, concerned that their choice could be red-baited for accepting DSA’s support, approached Jackson, asking his permission for DSA

to endorse him publicly. “We raised the problem with Jackson that we want to support you but we don’t want to support you in a way that would harm you,” said DSA Co-Chair Michael Harrington at the time.⁸ Jackson initially balked, but agreed to accept DSA’s endorsement. DSA’s timidity in publicizing its support for Jackson is certainly a strange way of implementing its minimum goal of moving the Democratic Party leftward—let alone its stated desire of popularizing the ideas of socialism in the United States!

When Democratic campaigns become the ends (even “short-term” ends) of DSA’s activity, the door is open to all sorts of compromises with the Democratic Party and with the ideas it represents. “When I criticize American foreign policy, our intervention in Central America, the MX [missiles], I do that in the name of the national security of the United States,” Harrington said during the 1984 election campaign. “Our [DSA’s] critique is that President Reagan’s policy with regard to Nicaragua does not promote the national security, it hurts it.” Irving Howe, another DSA leader, explained: “And you speak of national security because you recognize that there is a totalitarian enemy out there which needs to be met.”

DSA leaders have argued that Reagan’s success in appealing to patriotism and to “family values” showed that the Left must do the same if it is to break out of its current isolation from the majority of Americans. Harrington and Howe have expressed admiration for the Communist Party’s 1930s–1940s “Popular Front” period, when the CP adopted the slogan “Communism is 20th Century Americanism.” Then, the CP submerged its socialist politics to the pro-capitalist politics of the Roosevelt New Deal. DSA-affiliated intellectuals believe that the CP’s adoption of “Americanism” allowed it a greater impact on American political life. They believe the DSA could play the same role today if it follows the CP’s lesson from the 1930s.

This reading of American socialist history is mistaken. For at the same time as the CP adopted “Americanism,” it renounced class struggle. Its members acted as wartime strikebreakers. The New Deal set the U.S.’s political agenda. The CP was popular only to the extent that it backed the popular Roosevelt. The problem for American socialists at the time, however, and the problem of the CP in particular, was that it failed to seize the opportunity to build a strong working-class party independent of the Democrats. But one should not expect the DSA leaders to share this reading of history. Harrington argued that the 1930s Socialist Party “made a terrible mistake in counterposing [itself] to [the New Deal].”⁹

Today, DSA’s subservience to the Democratic Party is reinforced because DSA puts forth its positions within the Democratic Party. With the option of leaving the Democratic Party ruled out, the DSA must agree to play by the rules party bosses lay down if it is to remain in the party. Yet, with every step to the right, with every “Left” apology for rightward-moving Democratic policies, the goal of building a credible socialist alternative is placed on the back burner once again. Thus, DSA’s reliance on

the Democrats chains sincere activists—many of whom are attracted to the “socialist” in DSA’s title because they want to see fundamental change in the system—to one of the most solid institutions of capitalist rule, the Democratic Party.

Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition

To much of the Left, the most important development in the Reagan era was the rise of the Rainbow Coalition, which presented a strategy that attempted to combine (in theory, at least) support for both Democratic and for “independent” candidates. Many sincere activists and antiracists were drawn to the Reverend Jesse Jackson’s 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns as well as to other “insurgent” local campaigns, such as the 1983 election of the late Mayor Harold Washington in Chicago.

Those on the Left who supported the Rainbow Coalition usually gave one of three reasons for doing so. Some said the 1960s civil rights and Black Power movements failed to consolidate their gains because of “the separation of the social movements from electoral politics,” a problem the Rainbow Coalition solved.¹⁰ Others argued that the Rainbow Coalition assembled a “coalition of the rejected” that, if mobilized into the electoral arena, would push American politics to the Left. Still others claimed that the Rainbow Coalition offered a way to reinvigorate the movements of the 1960s. All of these arguments were faulty.

The movements of the 1960s did not decline because they failed to link up with electoral politics. Quite the opposite. The Democrats used the carrot-and-stick approach. While jailing, harassing, exiling, and assassinating the Black Power movement’s more radical sections (like the Black Panthers), the Democratic machine tried to coopt the mainstream section of the movement—with considerable success.

More than 20 years after the first Black mayor of a major city was elected, the record of Democratic officials elected with large Black voter mobilizations is well-known. These Black elected officials answered to the same corporate interests to whom their predecessors answered—and have time and again turned on their Black working-class constituents. In 1977, Maynard Jackson won plaudits from the predominantly white Atlanta Chamber of Commerce for crushing ruthlessly a strike of Black sanitation workers.¹¹ Detroit Mayor Coleman Young threatened to call out the National Guard to break a 1986 public employees strike. In perhaps the most ghastly example of a Black Democratic politician’s willingness to defend the status quo, Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode ordered the May 1985 firebombing of a Black countercultural group that espoused armed self-defense against racist attacks. The subsequent blaze killed eleven people, including seven children, and torched more than 100 Black working-class families’ homes.

If Black Democratic politicians uphold the interests of big business, is it true to say that the National Rainbow Coalition (NRC) represented a “coalition of the rejected?” Jackson pulled 80 percent of the Black Demo-

cratic vote in 1984 and more than 90 percent of the Black Democratic vote in 1988. But a closer look at a breakdown of the 1984 figures showed that Jackson voters represented the Black middle class, not Black workers or the poor. About 56 percent of Blacks turned out to vote in the 1984 election, underscoring the fact that most poor and working-class Blacks sat out the election. In ten of the thirteen 1984 state primaries where figures were available, the degree of support for Jackson among Black voters increased with voters’ incomes. Jackson delegates to the 1984 Democratic convention were the most highly-educated of all the delegates, and were second only to Mondale delegates in income level.¹² The profile of Jackson delegates was little different in 1988, except for the presence of larger numbers of Black Democratic politicians. Rather than representing the interests of the oppressed, the Rainbow Coalition represented the Black middle class that has a stake in the system.

To many Rainbow supporters, the NRC’s electoralism was secondary to its potential as a “political movement,” a description in the NRC’s founding document that appeared to reach beyond electoral politics. The Rainbow Coalition held the potential to mobilize thousands of the poor and oppressed for progressive ends, Rainbow supporters argued. Rainbow politicians’ electoral ambitions were seen as secondary to the “mass movement” which would provide the push for real reform struggles. What’s more, they argued, activists could use Jackson’s rhetoric and his access to the media to build “grassroots” struggles, like the anti-apartheid movement.

In reality, however, the opposite was more often the case. Jackson used whatever struggles existed to publicize his candidacy. While Jackson may have helped boost attendance at anti-apartheid rallies in 1985, many people that he attracted fell away soon afterward—precisely because activists failed to build a political base independent of Jackson or other Rainbow politicians. Reliance on politicians to build movements undercut efforts to build lasting, self-sustaining organizations that could win concrete victories.

Those who argue that the Rainbow Coalition’s potential has yet to be realized and that the Left should keep the organization “honest” forgot the weakness of their forces in relation to the more conservative NRC leadership. A board of directors of fifty to seventy-five members ran the NRC from day to day. As NRC president, Jackson was empowered to appoint twenty-five board members. Since the NRC bylaws allowed a board quorum of only 25 percent, control of the organization was in the hands of a few, predominantly handpicked, people.¹³ Jackson, his aides and his financial backers held the ultimate sway in the organization.

Some attendees at the April 1986 founding Rainbow Coalition conference and at the October 1987 biennial convention criticized the “heavy-handedness” of Jackson and his aides in running the conventions.¹⁴ Yet, such “top-heavy” organization was no accident. It reflected the NRC’s primary function as an electoral machine for Jackson. Moreover, the politics and rhetoric of Rainbow

politicians appeared “radical” only when they were compared with those of today’s conservative mainstream Democrats. When compared with stands of many mainstream Democrats in the 1960s and 1970s, the Rainbow’s politics were actually more conservative.

Nevertheless, some on the Left, including organizations like the National Committee for Independent Political Action (NCIPA), viewed the Rainbow Coalition as offering a “mass base” of the oppressed that could form a possible third party. But a Rainbow break from the Democrats was (and continues to be) a highly unlikely proposition, no matter how disdainfully the party treated Jackson and the NRC. As Jackson explained at the 1986 founding conference, “We have too much invested in the Democratic Party. When you have money in the bank you don’t walk away from it.”¹⁵ In essence, the NRC’s strategy was that of a liberal caucus in a Democratic Party moving rapidly rightwards. Jackson’s 1988 campaign solidified his role as the leader of the party’s liberals and positioned his supporters as the dominant force among Democratic liberals.

Jackson’s defense of a conservative electoral strategy in the Democratic Party was fully in character with his career. Jackson has never been a radical. He stood, for example, on the right wing of the mainstream civil rights movement. As one of the Reverend Martin Luther King’s lieutenants in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Jackson distinguished himself as an able fundraiser. Politically, however, he represented the SCLC’s right wing that opposed King’s plans to organize the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign. Jackson opposed King’s stress, in the last years of his life, on the need to connect demands for civil rights to economic demands, such as trade union rights and increased welfare spending.¹⁶

When he declared political independence from the SCLC, he did so on a program of “Black capitalism,” a conservative strategy of Black business development that even Republican President Richard Nixon backed. Jackson’s subsequent career at Chicago-based Operation PUSH stressed Black business development, self-help, and conservative morality.

Not surprisingly, his commitment to capitalism has not flagged. In a 1987 letter to *Business Week* magazine, Jackson answered a critic who charged he was “anti-business:” “A strong, healthy private economy is essential to our national well-being and our hopes for social progress. The future of the business establishment and of the nation itself are dependent upon attention to the long-range effects of current American business policies.... The interests of American business and the American people are mutual and inseparable.”¹⁷

If Jackson has tied American workers’ well-being to the health of capitalism, he has always acted to undercut the efforts of Black militants to build a political alternative independent of the capitalist parties. In 1972, when more than 8,000 Blacks from every part of the political spectrum gathered for the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana, Jackson worked to sabotage militant leaders’ attempts to create an all-Black radical

party. The convention passed a Black Political Agenda that condemned both the American system and the Democratic and Republican parties for ignoring Black demands. Jackson repudiated the Agenda, insisting to the conservative, heavily Democratic Michigan delegation that it was only a draft. Jackson accused delegates who opposed the convention leadership’s electoralism of undermining Black “unity.” Jackson later abandoned any pretense of supporting an independent Black initiative by joining up with Senator George McGovern’s 1972 Democratic presidential campaign. Jackson backed Jimmy Carter in 1976. In 1980, after Carter had alienated Blacks with his conservative policies, Jackson said that Blacks “had the responsibility” to listen to appeals from both major parties, implying that Ronald Reagan could offer something positive to Black America!¹⁸

1984 and 1988

The 1984 Jackson campaign took about 21 percent of the votes in Democratic primaries as well as several key Southern states. Nevertheless, Democratic Party rules limited the number of Jackson convention delegates so that Jackson could count on the support of only 11 percent of delegates. Thus, Mondale exacted Jackson’s endorsement. In the process, Mondale dismissed all of the Rainbow Coalition’s platform proposals, which included only two of seven proposals that comprised a minimum Black political agenda, according to two Jackson advisers.¹⁹

In 1988, things were quite different. Jackson opened the race with much greater support. Noting Jackson’s appeal among their constituents, many Black Democratic politicians who opposed Jackson in 1984—like Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and U.S. Rep. Mickey Leland (D-Texas)—either backed Jackson, or at least, did not back any of his opponents. Thus, rather than running an “insurgent” campaign, Jackson ran a deliberately mainstream race that rested on the support of the Black Democratic establishment.

One writer’s description of the 1988 February New Hampshire primary illustrated the difference: “In contrast to 1984, when elected officials and community leaders virtually ignored Jackson, the campaign boasts an impressive list of mainstream endorsements, including Chamber of Commerce officials, four state legislators... and the state president of the Association for the Elderly, among others.”²⁰

In November 1987, Jackson appointed Black California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, one of the most powerful politicians in California, chairman of his campaign. At the same time, he named Gerald Austin, manager for winning campaigns of Gov. Richard Celeste (D-Ohio), campaign manager. Brown said the Jackson campaign would not “appeal excessively to so-called Black concerns.” Austin pledged to run a “centrist” campaign.²¹ With experienced Democratic hands in charge of the campaign, it was more difficult than ever to distinguish Jackson’s “movement” campaign from any other mainstream Democratic campaign.

From the start, Jackson opted to run a “respectable” campaign. His October 10, 1987 announcement speech sounded patriotic, anti-drug themes. He fudged on key issues: instead of calling for an end to the 1987-88 U.S. Navy’s reflagging and escort of oil tankers through the Persian Gulf, he called for a greater sense of purpose in the operation and for moral support to U.S. troops no matter where they are.²²

Jackson made clear efforts to distance himself from other “extreme” positions. Only after the primaries ended in June 1988 did he mention the inequity of the Democratic presidential selection process that was the centerpiece of his campaign in 1984. In March 1988, in a bid for Zionist support, he said he would not meet with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yassir Arafat until the PLO recognizes Israel and renounces “terrorism.” This position represented an acceptance of the standard American foreign policy formulas for the Middle East.²³

Just as telling was his warning that Reagan’s botched efforts to remove Panama’s General Manuel Noriega held the potential to release “anti-American hysteria” in Panama. These were hardly the words of an anti-imperialist, as so many on the Left dubbed Jackson. In the U.S., Jackson kept an arm’s distance from real fights against racism—attempting to avoid the appearance of running a “Black” campaign. Thus, when campaigning in the New York primary, he avoided comment on New York’s Tawana Brawley racially-motivated rape case or police killings of Blacks and Latinos in New York City. For this reason, New York’s leading Black newspaper, the *New York City Sun*, refused to endorse him in the April primary.

After his victory in the 1988 Michigan primary, Jackson dropped references in his campaign speeches to his “poor campaign with a rich message.” This was because his campaign began to attract support from rich donors and from business. Figures released in April 1988 showed that the Jackson camp pulled in some \$2 million in March, only \$400,000 short of Democratic presidential nominee Governor Michael Dukakis campaign contributions. Jackson received the backing of former Carter Budget Director Bert Lance and from a virtual “Who’s Who of prominent Black businessmen.”²⁴ Another important Jackson adviser was Felix Rohatyn, the Lazard Freres investment banker who supervised massive budget cuts and union-busting in the mid-1970s New York City financial “bailout.”

“The Economic Common Ground”

In the Democratic primaries, Jackson pulled 9 percent of the Iowa caucus vote, 8 percent of the New Hampshire vote 1982, and 5 percent of the South Dakota vote. And in February’s Minnesota caucus, he finished second with nearly 20 percent of the delegates. Many commentators hailed his ability to attract votes in these nearly all-white states, attributing his success to his call for moving “from the racial battleground to the economic common ground.” Jackson appeared at the International Paper Co. strike in Jay, Maine, and at a rally for

more than 5,500 workers who will be laid off from Chrysler Corp.’s plant in Kenosha, Wisconsin to deliver this message. The often warm, 1987 reception Jackson received from rank-and-file workers contrasted sharply with the cold shoulder he felt from the AFL-CIO hierarchy. But did Jackson’s support among a minority of white workers (not to mention farmers) represent a blow against racism?

To the extent that some white workers’ support for Jackson represented a willingness to see beyond racial barriers, it was a welcome development. But supporting Jackson does not necessarily translate into a significant break with white racism. The grounds on which Jackson won support were a type of “populist” politics. Populist appeals seek to unite “the people” against forces like big business and big government.

Populism is not necessarily progressive; appeals against “big government” are more often associated with conservatives than with progressives. During the campaign, U.S. Representative Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) attracted support from some unions for his “populist” appeals against “foreign” competition. As populism is a flexible politics, Jackson could win white workers’ votes by criticizing “Corporate America” at the same time as he downplayed antiracist messages. This approach helped him to win votes. But it did little to build antiracist sentiment.

Jackson’s campaign unfolded in an atmosphere of increasing attacks on Blacks, from Howard Beach, New York, to Forsyth County, Georgia. With racists on the rampage, it was not sufficient simply to emphasize what white and Black workers held in common. White workers had to be won consciously to oppose racism. As it turned out, post-primary surveys showed that the bulk of Jackson’s white support came from middle-class liberals—not from workers or from farmers.

That Jackson was the only major candidate who regularly visited workers’ picket lines and rallies led some on the Left, like the radical newspaper, *The Guardian*, to argue that his was a “class conscious” campaign. Was this the case?

First, Jackson’s appearances had to be seen in their context: as stops on the campaign trail. He did not intervene in strikes to encourage workers to fight against their bosses, but to encourage workers to vote for him. He mediated between labor and management in strikes of St. Louis teachers and of Buffalo nurses. But the settlements he “won” were no different from those trade union officials negotiate. On the contrary, Jackson often proposed that “both sides” give up something. Second, labor union endorsements counted as much as endorsements from other “mainstream” organizations in the constituency/coalition politics on which presidential campaigns are based.

What happened to the Rainbow?

Despite appearances to the contrary, the 1988 Jackson campaign was not a grassroots effort. If it had been, the National Rainbow Coalition, Inc., would have built in-

dependently of the Jackson presidential campaign. This was not the case, and the NRC withered as all of its resources were plowed into the Jackson campaign. Activists who joined the Rainbow Coalition with the aim of building an “independent” Rainbow distinct from Jackson’s campaign found their hopes dashed.

In late 1987, the NCIPA, which entered the campaign hoping to build an “independent” Rainbow, protested Jackson’s move of activist Ron Daniels out of the NRC office and into the Jackson campaign machinery. Daniels’ transfer indicated that Jackson was not serious about building the Rainbow as a force independent of his own electoral ambitions, NCIPA’s National Steering Committee argued. Despite its criticisms, NCIPA pledged to remain in the Jackson campaign. Jackson’s hesitation to accept DSA’s endorsement constituted another example of his reluctance to build the Rainbow as a “Left” force. The Vermont Rainbow Coalition organization also complained to the NRC’s office that Jackson’s shifts to the right would cost him the support of progressives while failing to win any conservatives to his side.²⁵

When all was said and done, the Democratic Party’s candidate for November was a solid representative of the “neo-liberals,” Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Big victories in the June 1988 California and New Jersey primaries gave Dukakis more than the 2,081 delegates he needed for the Democratic nomination at the July convention in Atlanta. With the votes of most of the more than 600 “superdelegates,” party officials and politicians chosen by party officials and politicians to assure selection of an “electable” candidate, committed to Dukakis, the Massachusetts governor wrapped up the Democratic nomination on the first ballot.

The choice of Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen as Dukakis’ running mate confirmed the Democrats’ acceptance of Reaganite policies. Bentsen had the distinction of being the most “pro-Reagan” Democrat in the 1981 Congress which passed Reagan’s reactionary program, according to Congressional Quarterly. Bentsen, backed with millions in contributions from Texas big business, supports: aid to the contras, the death penalty, the B-1 bomber and the MX missile, mandatory school prayer, denial of public funds for abortion and mandatory AIDS testing. It’s little wonder that Bentsen’s rating by the liberal lobbying group Americans for Democratic Action equalled the ratings for three Republican senators.²⁶

Jackson forces arrived in Atlanta with much fanfare. But within days of the convention opening, Jackson pledged his delegates’ backing for the Dukakis-Bentsen ticket in exchange for representation of several of his advisers (including his son) on the Democratic National Committee and in the Dukakis campaign. Any hope that he would bring a “progressive” influence to the party platform was quashed for the sake of party “unity.” Jackson agreed to withdraw most of his delegation’s “progressive” platform planks. Dukakis accepted the symbolic labeling of South Africa as a terrorist state, a decision which, two years after the Republican-dominated

Senate voted sanctions against South Africa, hardly represented a breakthrough for the Left. Dukakis forces soundly defeated three other Jackson minority planks calling for increased taxes on the rich, for “no first use” of nuclear weapons, and for a vague form of Palestinian self-determination.

There should never have been any doubt that Jackson would deliver his supporters to Dukakis in the end. That was the whole aim of the operation: Jackson traded his delegates for his own acceptance into the party’s inner circle. A comment from one of Jackson’s advisers summed it up: “We could come in to sack and ruin, particularly with the number of delegates we have. But we’re not doing that. We’ve agreed to disagree [with Dukakis], but that in itself is a form of agreement.”²⁷ In the spirit of party unity, Jackson’s address to the convention endorsed the demands of party conservatives: “Conservatives and progressives, when you fight for what you believe, you are right—but your patch isn’t big enough.”²⁸

But Rainbow supporters were faced with the prospect of voting for Dukakis, a man whose reputation as a liberal bears no relation to his policies as governor of Massachusetts. Under the “Massachusetts miracle,” unemployment declined on the strength of a post-1982 boom in military-related high tech investment. At the same time, the “Massachusetts miracle” created a two-tier economy—a few highly-paid jobs for technical professionals and thousands of minimum-wage service jobs. “There’s lots of jobs washing the floors of the shiny new buildings,” said a Boston welfare rights group representative. Since 1982, unionization in the state has dropped by as much as 25 percent as several major unionized workplaces closed down.

Dukakis received most of his financial backing from investment banks, real-estate interests, and high-tech industries. In return, Dukakis refused to oppose a business-backed bill to repeal a construction industry “prevailing wage” law. In 1984, Dukakis backed plant-closing legislation that specifically removed any responsibility from business to provide retraining programs or dislocation assistance to communities. In 1988, Dukakis’ budget for the state called for slashing \$100 million from social programs and \$22 million from education funding.

The state’s “progressive” Employment and Training Choices Program, which is supposed to get women off the welfare rolls and into productive jobs, is really a source of cheap labor for the state’s businesses. A recent study of the first 25,000 welfare recipients placed in jobs under the program revealed that 40 percent of the women remain in poverty. Finally, Dukakis is a well-known homophobe who has attacked a state-funded pamphlet on safe sex as “too explicit” and who has barred gay and lesbian foster parents in the state. In May 1988, revelations that Massachusetts police were infiltrating gay and lesbian rights groups’ meetings surfaced. Dukakis declared that he did not see anything inappropriate about the operation. In addition, he opposed the distribution of sterile needles to drug users to cut down

on the spread of AIDS.”²⁹

With these reactionary positions to his credit, it's little wonder that Dukakis could claim to be more conservative than Republican candidate Vice President George Bush. In a June 7 ABC television interview with the two candidates, Dukakis insisted that “I am, in some respects, more conservative...than that crowd in the White House.” He compared his record of slashing programs in Massachusetts to balance the budget with Reagan's multi-billion dollar deficit, asking “Who's the conservative and who's the liberal?”³⁰

Activists who gave so much energy to nominate Jesse Jackson faced the choice of voting for the conservative ticket Jackson endorsed. Such was a stark illustration of the ultimate problem with the Rainbow Coalition strategy. From the start, its strategy succeeded in binding activists to the big business interests that really control the Democratic Party. As such, the Rainbow Coalition was one more diversion that detracted from the building of a real alternative, independent of the capitalist parties,

Still, many of the activists who support the Rainbow Coalition are not “party hack” Democrats. Many are serious antiracists and working-class militants attracted to the Rainbow for want of other alternatives. If they are disillusioned with the electoral process, their disillusionment need not end in cynicism. In fact, they can help to build a socialist alternative to the capitalist parties. But only revolutionary socialist politics can address their political questions seriously and turn their disillusionment with the system into a willingness to fight it.

1 “New Choices for a Changing America,” Washington, D.C.: Democratic National Committee, 1986.

2 Ibid.

3 See, for example, David Plotke, “Democratic Dilemmas,” in Davis, Pfeil and Sprinker (eds.), *The Year Left 1* (New York: Verso, 1985), 109-30. Plotke calls for a “broad-based alternative to Reaganism” which combines Hart's economic strategy for growth and Jackson's concern for social justice. Plotke argues that activist groups will have to make compromises on their basic principles and that “special interests” (like labor unions) will have to give up on some of their demands for this strategy to succeed in winning back the White House.

4 Eric Chester, *Socialists and the Ballot Box* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 143.

5 For a solid recounting of the history and politics of the “realignment” perspective, see Chester, 131-47.

6 Ibid., 146.

7 Robert Brenner, “The Paradox of Social Democracy: The American Case,” in Davis, Pfeil and Sprinker (eds.), 65.

8 “Jackson Seeking Socialist Backing,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1987, 1:28.

9 Quotes from Harrington and Howe are excerpted from “Voices on the Left,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 17, 1984, 24ff. For Howe's defense of the Popular Front, see his *Socialism and America*.

10 Sheila Collins, *The Rainbow Challenge* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 105.

11 Peter K. Eisinger, *The Politics of Displacement* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 93.

12 Adolph L. Reed, Jr., *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 74.

13 See Lee Sustar's report from the October 1987 Rainbow Coalition convention, “A Rainbow Solution?” *Socialist Worker* (U.S.) (November 1987), 5.

14 See the reports of the NRC convention in *The Guardian*, April 30,

1986, pp. 1, 15 and in *In These Times*, April 30-May 6, 1986, 5.

15 *The Guardian*, April 30, 1986, 15.

16 For information on Jackson's relationship with King, see David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. & the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 584-93.

17 Jackson's letter to the editor, *Business Week* (July 1, 1987), 10.

18 See Lee Sustar, “The Black Political Convention of 1972,” *Socialist Worker* (U.S.), April 1988, p. 4. Also see Marable, *Black American Politics: From the Washington Marches to Jesse Jackson* (New York: Verso, 1985), 266.

19 Reed, 14-15.

20 Paul Hockenjos' report in *The Guardian*, February 17, 1988, p. 1.

21 “Jackson Names 2 to Head Campaign,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1987, 1:35.

22 Sustar, “A Rainbow Solution?”

23 See “Jesse Jackson on Arafat & the PLO,” *Against the Current* 15 (new series) (July/August 1988): 18.

24 *New York Times*, “Briefing,” March 22, 1988, IV:31.

25 Joanna Misnik, “The Rainbow: Storm Clouds Ahead?” *Against the Current* 11 (November/December, 1987): 7.

26 Information on Bentsen from James Ledbetter and Ariel Kaminer, “Special Interests' Get Their Veep,” *Guardian*, August 3, 1988, 7.

27 Jackson adviser Robert Borosage quoted in “Deal, Jesse, Deal,” *Socialist Worker* (U.S.), July 1988, 5.

28 “The Hollow Men,” *The Progressive*, September 1988, p. 6.

29 Information on Dukakis from a two-part *Guardian* series by Beatrix Hoffman and Rebecca Thatcher, “The Duke of Business,” (June 1, 1988), pp. 1, 7 and “Gays, Poor Left Out of Massachusetts Miracle,” (June 8, 1988), 6, 11.

30 Maureen Dowd, “Dukakis and Bush Spar on Conservatism,” *New York Times*, June 8, 1988, p. 10.

Why is There No Alternative?

THE ELECTORAL ARENA offers no real choice for those interested in more fundamental change than the Democrats are willing to deliver. But this has not always been the case. On the contrary, socialist parties have won significant numbers of votes from the best working-class militants in the past. The reasons for the failure of these socialist parties to take a long-term foothold in the American working class has little to do with “exceptional” American conditions.¹ It has everything to do with the politics of the Left and its historical relationship with the Democratic Party.

The Socialist Party and electoralism

With socialism a seemingly “dirty” word today, it is sometimes easy to forget that in the first two decades of this century, socialist candidates pulled hundreds of thousands of votes nationally and were chosen as mayors, city council members, and state legislators across the country. In 1912, the Socialist Party’s (SP) candidate for president, Eugene V. Debs, won 6 percent of the vote and 1,200 SP members held elective office in 340 municipalities.²

But by 1920, the SP was finished as a serious competitor for the loyalties of the most politically conscious workers. In the last few years of its existence as a strong force on the Left, its policy stands differed little from those of the Democrats and Republicans whose voters it hoped to capture. What happened?

The origin of the SP’s trouble was the fact that it was neither revolutionary nor a wholly working-class party. The SP tolerated within its midst Christian socialists, revolutionaries and open racists, earning its description by revolutionary socialist James P. Cannon as a “socialist variety store.”³ Initially, the party’s left wing (which included Debs, Bill Haywood, and other revolutionaries) held sway in the organization. The Left stood for industrial unionism, for class struggle and for a revolutionary transformation of society. The party’s conservative

and middle-of-the-road elements, on the other hand, stood for gradual reform and an orientation to the American Federation of Labor craft unions, most of which excluded immigrants, women, Blacks, and the unskilled.

As a greater number of SP officials won local office, the conservative wing of the party, led by Milwaukee Mayor (later U.S. Representative) Victor Berger and International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union leader Morris Hillquit, consolidated its hold. They turned the SP into a primarily electoral machine for the ambitions of Socialist politicians. The Socialist mayors became known as “gas and water” or “sewer” socialists, for they distinguished themselves from Democrats and Republicans only by promising to deliver city services more efficiently.

Rather than running elections to educate working-class voters on the necessity of overthrowing capitalism, the SP increasingly competed with the capitalist parties on the capitalist parties’ terms. This adaptation quickly led to the party’s internal transformation. More middle-class career seekers joined up. In 1913, the party’s increasingly conservative leadership declared its desire to keep the party within the bounds of the law, renouncing many of the tactics of class struggle that the bosses considered “illegal.” It announced its intention to expel any member who violated the law and arbitrarily stripped Haywood’s position on the party executive committee—a position to which the party

membership had elected him.

By limiting its “political action to electoral campaigns, the party lost any power to win large numbers of workers to socialism. In response to the SP’s transformation into a party of middle-class reform, many of its best working-class militants simply quit. The SP’s acceptance of electoralism set back the building of a socialist alternative for years.

The Communist Party, 1919–1950

The Communist Party, formed in 1919 in the wake of the Russian Revolution, was committed to building its ranks from its participation in the class struggle. In its earliest days, CP election campaigns aimed to spread Marxist ideas, rather than to win office. The CP succeeded in winning a reputation as a party of committed fighters and socialists, recruiting many radicals in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Unfortunately, the CPs, internationally and in the U.S., were transformed by the late 1920s from parties which fought for workers’ power to parties which were no more than mouthpieces for Stalin’s new regime.⁴ In the U.S. the CP squandered its initial successes when, in the 1930s, it adopted a policy of “Popular Front” alliances with “progressive” Democrats. By the Second World War, the CP supported positions nearly indistinguishable from those of the New Deal Democrats. The shift of the U.S.’s leading radical organization into the Democratic Party camp explains much of the Lefts uncritical present-day attitude to the Democrats.

After Hitler’s 1933 accession to power, war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union was almost inevitable. Desiring to gain allies against Hitler among the Western powers, Stalin declared the “Popular Front against Fascism” in 1935. The Moscow-based Communist International urged Communist parties to give up organizing for revolution within the Western countries and to seek alliances with these countries’ “progressive forces.” From previously refusing to work with any reformist workers’ parties, the CPs now allied with openly capitalist parties, no matter how conservative or middle-class they were.

In the U.S., the Communist Party’s search for liberal allies led it into a position as the left wing of the New Deal. In 1936, the party supported Roosevelt’s reelection. In its new search for “respectability,” the party became increasingly reliant on dealings with the union officials and increasingly distant from the rank and file.⁵

In the trade unions, the CP activists—the backbone of the militant struggles which built the CIO—became apologists for the union leaderships which had cast their lot with the New Deal. Following the 1936–37 sit-down movement that won recognition for the United Auto Workers (UAW) at General Motors (GM), the CP attempted to win friends in the UAW hierarchy and, by extension, in the Roosevelt administration. In practice, this meant opposing rank-and-file militancy and activism against the government’s war drive. CP leaders, many of whom carried well-deserved reputations as respected militants, were the central players in bringing the November 1937 GM Pontiac wildcat and factory occupation to a close. Workers won none of their major contract demands.

These sorts of maneuvers cost the CP an historic oppor-

tunity to win thousands of workers to socialism. The late 1930s were a period of great radicalization in the working class, as the militant factory occupations that built the CIO attested. It is estimated that by mid-1937, the CP controlled or held substantial influence in 40 percent of the CIO internationals.⁶ Rather than attempting to weld these workers into a socialist party, the CP acceded to Roosevelt’s and the union leaders’ capture of the CIO for the Democratic Party.

The Second World War and the witch-hunts

The CP changed its tune on Roosevelt and the New Deal for the brief period of the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression Pact (1939–41). Almost overnight, CP literature transformed Roosevelt and the New Deal Democrats from allies in the struggle against fascism into imperialist warmongers. The CP returned to militancy on the shopfloor, playing a key role in the important 1941 strikes against the Allis Chalmers Corporation and North American Aviation. Roosevelt used the U.S. Army to break the North American strike in July 1941. But 11 days following the end of the North American strike, Hitler invaded Russia. The CP returned to its hysterical patriotic support for Roosevelt and agitated for U.S. intervention in the war.⁷

The CP immediately found itself on the extreme right wing of the labor movement as the most consistent defender of the CIO-Roosevelt wartime “no-strike pledge.” It went so far as to break strikes which even the CIO leadership begrudgingly agreed to support.⁸ Thus, the CP was unable to take advantage of the wave of wildcat strikes that broke out between 1943 and 1945. Worse, the CP supported the U.S. government’s 1941 prosecution of leaders of the Trotskyist movement under the Smith Act, which made advocating the government’s overthrow a federal crime. In this era, the CP raised the slogan “Communism is 20th Century Americanism.”

The CP’s constant twists and turns and opposition to rank-and-file initiatives left militant workers disoriented. Since the party deserted militants in struggle in the 1940s, militants deserted the party when the government stepped up its repression in the late 1940s and early 1950s McCarthyite witch-hunts. When the Democrats needed the CP to help them police the working class during the Second World War, the CP obliged. But when the Democrats had no further use of the CP and turned on it, the CP had nowhere to turn for support. Ironically, nine years after backing the government’s imprisonment of the Trotskyists under the Smith Act, the government sent leaders of the Communist Party to jail under the same act.

The CP’s “tailing” of the Democratic Party had a long-term impact on the development of the socialist Left in this country. As revolutionary socialist James P. Cannon, one of the Trotskyists imprisoned in 1941, summed up, the CP was:

directly responsible for the demoralization and disorientation of the richly promising movement. The Roosevelt social program was the decisive factor in heading off the mass movement and diverting it into reformist channels. But the Stalinists, who supported Roosevelt for reasons of

Kremlin foreign policy, miseducated, betrayed, corrupted and demoralized the vanguard of this movement—a vanguard which numbered tens of thousands of the best and most courageous young militants—and thus destroyed the first great prospects to build a genuine revolutionary party in America on a mass basis.⁹

The 1960s New Left and the Democrats

The 1950s anticommunist witch-hunts in the unions severed the link between socialist ideas and the working class that had flourished in the 1930s. But the 1960s civil rights movement, followed by the student movement and the emerging movement against the US. war in Vietnam, revived the Left's fortunes. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, millions were swept into political activity. By the end of the 1960s, thousands of radicals joined new organizations of the revolutionary Left. Despite this radicalization, the "new Left's" political weaknesses accounted for the fact that the upsurge produced no significant socialist organization. On the contrary, many of the "generation of '68" today campaign for Democratic candidates like the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

The "new Left" represented an amalgam of all sorts of political perspectives—liberal, anarchist and revolutionary. The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the main new Left organization which claimed 80,000–100,000 members by 1968, emerged as an offshoot of the liberal League for Industrial Democracy (LID). Eventually to shift dramatically to the Left, SDS held initially to LID's liberal politics.¹⁰ In 1964, this translated into support for the Democratic campaign of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Johnson's opponent that year was reactionary Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. Johnson campaigned as the "peace candidate" against "extremist" Goldwater. When Congress, in August 1964, passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Johnson promised "We seek no wider war. . ." The resolution, passed in response to a phony "incident" in which North Vietnamese forces were said to have fired on the U.S. Navy, provided Johnson the "blank check" he sought to escalate the war.¹¹

The threat of a Goldwater victory frightened SDS, which adopted the slogan "Half Way with LBJ." This slogan meant support for Johnson against Goldwater—predominantly on the strength of his liberal "Great Society" domestic programs—without a wholesale endorsement of the Democrats. Many SDS activists flocked to Johnson's campaign, registering voters and "getting out the vote" on election day. Johnson won in a landslide, taking 61 percent of the popular vote.¹²

Within months of his inauguration, Johnson showed his cards. In 1965, Johnson dispatched the marines to install a pro-U.S. government in the Dominican Republic. In March 1965, he asked Congress for a massive escalation of the Vietnam war effort. By the decade's end, more than 550,000 troops would be sent to fight in Vietnam. More than 58,000 Americans and 1.3 million Vietnamese would die in the Vietnam War. As the war effort impinged on the government's ability to spend on the "War on Poverty," even the promise of liberal reform at home was undercut. A leading radical explained the lessons of the 1964 election:

In 1964, you know all the people who convinced themselves that Lyndon Johnson was the lesser evil as against Goldwater ... Many of them have realized that the spiked shoe was on the other foot; and they lacerate themselves with the thought that the man they voted for 'actually carried out Goldwater's policy.' . . . Who was really the Lesser Evil in 1964? The point is that it is the question which is a disaster, not the answer. In setups in which the choice is between one capitalist politician and another, the defeat comes in accepting the limitation to this choice.¹³

Following the 1964 debacle, fuelled by the escalation of the Vietnam War, the student and antiwar movements shifted rapidly to the left. By 1968, much of the radical movement identified the Democratic Party as "the enemy." For those radicals who rejected electoralism altogether, 1968 is remembered for the Chicago police riot against the young radicals who picketed the Democratic convention held there. Unfortunately, the revolutionary Left was unable to offer a strong alternative for those radicals who rejected the Democratic Party.

The dominant politics of the revolutionary Left, which modeled itself on "Third World" revolutionary movements (e.g. Cuba, Vietnam, China), gave little guidance to those fed up with the system. Some revolutionaries proposed action, such as urban guerrilla warfare, inappropriate to the American context. This exposed radicals needlessly to FBI-engineered repression. Other revolutionaries engineered a sense of impending revolution when there was little real evidence to support it. The dashing of hopes that ensued sapped revolutionary organizations' energies. Those revolutionaries who had viewed Mao's China as a model of a new society and a leader of anti-imperialist fights were disoriented when Mao himself made peace with Nixon, the world's chief imperialist leader, in 1972. By the mid-1970s, movement struggle declined. Significant revolutionary organizations, unable to readjust to the changed circumstances, simply dissolved. Many of their members, rejecting as "sectarian" their attempts to build explicitly revolutionary organizations, have drifted back into Democratic electoral campaigns. A handful of ex-radicals, like former Chicago Eight defendant Tom Hayden, found new careers as Democratic Party politicians. But many others from the "generation of '68" became foot soldiers in the Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, working to sign up voters for the Democratic Party they had once condemned as the party of Southern segregation and of the Vietnam War.

Conclusion

Since the New Deal, the Democratic Party has acted as one of the chief obstacles to the building of a socialist movement. The CP's alliance with the Democrats continues to this day. And the "New Left's" failure to build a stable socialist organization continues to haunt today's Left. Today, most of the Left accepts the necessity of support for the Democrats. This perspective has had the effect of providing a "Left" cover for the liberal politics of "lesser evilism," as much of the Left provides the backbone for the campaigns of Democratic candidates. Registering voters, organizing fundraisers, and getting out the vote for "progressive" Dem-

ocratic candidates builds illusions in the ability or willingness of those candidates to enact reforms. The task of socialists should be to break illusions in the capitalist system and its politicians—not to strengthen those illusions.

It follows that the first task of socialists in the U.S. today is to reject any support for Democratic candidates, no matter how “left-liberal” their rhetoric sounds. But once socialists reject the Democratic Party, they must pose a clear socialist alternative.

- 1 “American exceptionalism” is the term given to the observation that the U.S. working class has not—unlike working classes in other advanced countries—developed a reformist labor party. Most writers on “American exceptionalism,” beginning with Werner Sombart’s 1906 essay “Why is there no socialism in the United States?,” tend to explain it by referring to any one of a number of “sociological” factors: the presence of the American frontier, the ethnic and racial diversity of the American working class, etc. All of these theories fail to explain why countries with similar “sociological” features (e.g. Canada) have developed labor parties. And they tend to divert attention away from the real political factors (the role of the Left, the role of the trade union bureaucracy, etc.) that do explain “American exceptionalism.” In this way, writers on “American exceptionalism” can proclaim that the American working class can never be won to socialism, and must be happy for what it can win from liberal Democratic politicians. See, for example, Irving Howe, *Socialism and America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1985).
- 2 James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America: 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage, 1967), 93, 103.
- 3 James P. Cannon, “Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Movement of His Time,” in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* (New York: Pathfinder, 1962), 258.

- 4 See Chris Harman, *How the Revolution Was Lost* (London: Bookmarks, 1988).
- 5 Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 133–38.
- 6 Daniel Guerin, *100 Years of Labor in the U.S.A.* Translated by Alan Adler. (London: Ink Links, 1979), 105.
- 7 Art Preis, *Labor’s Giant Step* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972), 123.
- 8 For example, CP member Harry Bridges, the longshore union leader, ordered union members to break a 1944 strike of Montgomery Ward workers. The CIO had agreed to back the strike since company policies were extremely antiunion and since retail trade had little to do with the war effort. See Preis, 222.
- 9 Cannon quoted in Michael Goldfield, “Recent Historiography of the Communist Party USA,” in Davis, Pfeil and Sprinker (eds.), 351.
- 10 For membership figures and SDS history, see Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973). Membership figure quoted on p. 479.
- 11 Benjamin L. Page and Mark P. Petracca, *The American Presidency* (New York: McGraw Hill and Co., 1983), 135–36. Actually, Johnson had prepared the resolution long before the Tonkin Gulf incident and awaited an opportune time to use it.
- 12 Ironically, the Left need not have worried about Goldwater’s election. First, all public opinion polls showed huge majorities opposed to his election. Second, most of big business found Goldwater too “extreme” for its tastes as well. Sixty percent of members of the Business Council, an extremely influential Washington advisory group composed of chief executives of the top 400 U.S. companies, backed Johnson. And LBJ won the lion’s share of corporate contributions to the presidential candidates. See Kim McQuaid, *Big Business and Presidential Power* (New York: William Morrow & Co, 1982), 231–33.
- 13 Hal Draper, “Who’s Going to Be the Lesser Evil in ‘68?” in Michael Friedman, ed., *The New Left of the Sixties* (Berkeley: Independent Socialist Press, 1972), 57.

Further reading:

“Anybody but Bush?” by Alan Maass
International Socialist Review 30, July–August 2003
<http://www.isreview.org/issues/30/anybodybutBush.shtml>

“The Dean Deception” by Keith Rosenthal
International Socialist Review 32, November–December 2003
<http://www.isreview.org/issues/32/dean.shtml>

“Who’s Going to be the Lesser Evil in 1968?” by Hal Draper
International Socialist Review special reprint
<http://www.isreview.org/issues/34/draper.shtml>

“Marxists and Elections” by Paul D’Amato
International Socialist Review 13, August–September 2000
http://www.isreview.org/issues/13/marxists_elections.shtml

“The Democrats and the Death Penalty” by Paul D’Amato
International Socialist Review 6, Spring 1999
http://www.isreview.org/issues/06/dems_death.shtml

“The 1930s: Turning Point for U.S. Labor” by Sharon Smith
International Socialist Review 25, September–October 2002
http://www.isreview.org/issues/25/The_1930s.shtml

Resources on the Web:

Socialist Worker
www.socialistworker.org

International Socialist Review
www.isreview.org

CounterPunch
www.counterpunch.org