

US Vice President Gore bows to Cuban rightists in Elian Gonzalez case

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While the world looks on with a combination of horror and disbelief, the US government continues to retreat before the right-wing element within the Cuban-exile population which has made six-year-old Elian Gonzalez a political trophy in its reactionary crusade against the Castro regime. The government's temporizing culminated this week in Vice President Al Gore's repudiation of the Clinton administration's policy and embrace of the Cuban exile forces holding the child.

The stage was set when, for the second time in a week, the Justice Department postponed a deadline for the Miami relatives to give written assurances that they will turn Elian over to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) should a federal appeals court uphold, as is expected, a lower court ruling rejecting their attempt to prevent the boy's return to his father in Cuba.

The backpedaling of the Justice Department and the INS was reinforced by President Bill Clinton, who went out of his way at a press conference earlier in the week to strike a conciliatory note toward the anti-Castro lobby, which is headed by the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF).

The diffidence of the federal authorities has emboldened the anti-Castro forces, who have had the support of the Republicans and some prominent Democrats since they obtained custody of Elian last November, when the child was plucked from the waters off the Florida coast.

Hundreds of residents of Miami's "Little Havana" have surrounded the house where Elian is staying, vowing to forcibly resist any attempt by the federal government to remove him and reunite him with his father. On March 29 the mayors of Miami-Dade County and the city of Miami solidarized themselves with the protesters, declaring they would refuse to comply with federal officials or deploy local police to protect them against the anti-Castro demonstrators.

These statements border on incitement to riot. The

Miami officials are well aware of the potential for violence, which is compounded by the terrorist proclivities of leading figures in and around the CANF, who have been linked to terrorist actions against Cuba and drug-smuggling operations carried out in the 1980s by US-backed paramilitaries in Central America.

The response of Vice President Al Gore, the presumptive Democratic candidate for president in the November elections, was to publicly break with the policy of his own administration and align himself with the CANF. On March 30 Gore announced his support for a bill that would take the case of Elian Gonzalez out of the hands of the INS and the federal courts and place it under the jurisdiction of Florida child custody courts.

This proposal, which coincides with the legal strategy of Elian's Miami relatives, contravenes established national and international law as well as basic precepts concerning the democratic rights of refugees, which uphold the right of children to be reunited with their parents. It would, in effect, strip Elian Gonzalez and his father of this fundamental right and set the stage for a politically-motivated judge to sanction what amounts to the kidnapping of a child.

Clinton, who has spent his presidency accommodating himself to right-wing forces, made light of Gore's defection. But the action of the vice president—defying the policy of the White House—is virtually unprecedented in US history. The specific issue on which Gore chose to break, and the circumstances surrounding his action, make it all the more extraordinary.

Gore has lent the prestige of his office and the power of his position as standard bearer of the Democratic Party to rightist forces who have assumed a semi-insurrectionary posture toward the federal government, refusing to abide by the law or recognize the authority of the courts and government officials. In so doing, he has provided them with a cloak of legitimacy.

This development has the most profound political implications. It is the latest demonstration of the weakness and fragility of American bourgeois democracy. Gore's action epitomizes the enormous degree to which the political establishment and the institutions of the state are beholden to extreme right-wing forces, who exert an influence within the political system far out of proportion to their support within the general population.

The Cuban-exile lobby is, in a very real sense, a political Frankenstein monster, created and cultivated by US ruling circles as part of their Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union, and now exercising a virtual veto over US policy toward Cuba.

For 40 years the government built up the Cuban anticommunist forces that are today defying it. Many of the founders and leaders of this element were recruited and trained by the CIA in the early period of American efforts to subvert the Castro regime. In the intervening period, the political establishment has adapted itself to the Cuban lobby, to the point that no US administration is capable of developing a rational policy toward Cuba, even from the standpoint of the long-term economic and strategic interests of American capitalism.

Gore's alignment with the Cuban lobby in the Elian Gonzalez case is generally explained in the media as a simple matter of electoral expediency. No doubt, opportunist calculations about winning Florida's electoral votes in November played a role, but such considerations alone cannot account for the influence of this element within both the Democratic and Republican parties.

Indeed, from a purely logical standpoint, Gore's solicitousness toward the CANF seems to be somewhat irrational. There is no popular groundswell of support for the captors of Elian Gonzalez. If anything, the opposite is the case.

The inhumane and almost demented behavior of the anti-Castro fanatics, so clearly detrimental to the interests of the child they are supposedly "saving," has alienated the vast majority of Americans, including large numbers of Cuban-Americans. If anything, the government's cringing before the Cuban lobby provokes anger and disgust, by exposing the double standard in US immigration policy, which treats Cuban immigrants as a special case while routinely deporting, jailing and even killing Mexicans, Haitians and other nationals who seek refuge in America.

But, as was seen in the year-long Clinton impeachment crisis, both big business parties fear nothing more than alienating extreme right-wing forces, whether in the form of the anti-Castro lobby or the Christian right. In the

impeachment crisis the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, were continually taken aback by the overwhelming hostility of the American people to the attempt of reactionary forces, spearheaded by the independent counsel, to leverage a sex scandal into a political coup.

The inordinate power of the extreme right within the American political system is an expression of the alienation of the power structure from the masses of working people. To the extent that the popular base of both parties has eroded, and neither party is capable of addressing the real concerns of the people, or even communicating with them in any serious way, bourgeois politics has become increasingly tied to the most anti-democratic and anti-social forces.

Two critical lessons emerge from the events of the past week. First, Gore's actions provide a devastating refutation of the view that victory for the Democrats in November will in some way stem the tide of reaction in the US. Only those who are either too alienated to think or engaged in deliberate self-deception can continue to believe this notion following Gore's embrace of fanatics who exploit a six-year-old to pursue a reactionary agenda.

As Gore's Republican opponent George W. Bush emphasized, the Democratic candidate has adopted the Republican position on the Elian Gonzalez case. This underscores the absence of any genuine alternative for working people in the November elections.

The second lesson is the danger of entrusting democratic rights to the Democratic Party and the present political system. Only the independent political mobilization of the working class, through the building of its own mass party, can provide the basis for defending the basic rights of the American people.



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