

Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore pushes "law-and-order" agenda

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In recent weeks Vice President Al Gore, the Democratic presidential candidate, has tacked to the right, pledging to be a "law enforcement president" and calling for the police and court system to be beefed up.

In a speech before police personnel in the Kansas City suburb of Rayton, Missouri, Gore unveiled a proposal for the hiring of 10,000 additional prosecutors nationwide. The Gore campaign has already called for 50,000 additional police, a proposal modeled on President Clinton's pledge to put 100,000 more cops on the street. In addition, the Democratic National Committee has begun running campaign ads in which Gore poses with uniformed police officers.

"Here is my commitment: the toughest, most effective anti-crime strategy this nation has ever seen, more police and more prosecutors to widen the thin blue line between order and disorder," Gore told the assembled police officers.

Gore also proposed a fund to build up the police presence in so-called "crime hot spots," i.e., impoverished working class neighborhoods. The money would be used to "provide resources to hire more police, pay cops overtime in troubled crime areas, equip neighborhoods with the latest crime prevention technologies, and help local authorities work in cooperation with federal authorities." The plan is part of a \$1.1 billion law enforcement package.

The Democratic candidate is also calling for enactment of a "Crime Victims' Bill of Rights." At a July 18 appearance in Memphis, Tennessee, Gore outlined his proposal for a constitutional amendment that would, among other things, give crime victims the right to sue attackers for lost earnings and give them input into such matters as sentencing and parole.

Republicans denounced Gore's focus on victims' rights as another Democratic attempt to co-opt the

policies of the political right. They pointed out that earlier this year the White House vetoed a Republican sponsored victims' rights bill, substantively similar to the Gore proposal, on the grounds that it would erode the constitutional rights of defendants.

Victims' rights demagoguery on the part of Democrats and Republicans alike is a lever for carrying out new attacks on civil liberties. Crime is a social problem whose ultimate sources are poverty, unemployment and economic insecurity. Neither Gore nor his Republican counterpart George Bush is able to address these questions in a meaningful manner. Both parties reject using the federal surplus to increase spending on social programs.

On the issues of crime, victims' rights, tax reform, the anti-missile defense system and many other questions, a similar pattern holds. The Democrats advance a slightly watered down version of reactionary positions advanced by the Republicans.

Gore's call for hiring more police and prosecutors comes at a time when US prisons are already packed, for the most part with people from the poorest and most exploited sections of the population. With just five percent of the world's population, the US has one-quarter of the world's prisoners, two million people, more than any other country.

Since taking office, the Clinton-Gore administration has overseen a huge increase in the US prison population. While cutting money for social programs, the White House, with the support of the Republican Congress, has carried out a dramatic expansion of the police and prison system. At the same time both parties have supported more stringent sentencing and the trying of juveniles as adults. Clinton and Gore both support the death penalty, and have presided over a huge increase in the rate of executions.

There is hardly a groundswell of public support for a further buildup of the police and courts. Instead, there are signs of growing public revulsion over assembly-line executions and rampant police brutality and corruption.

Like other planks in the Democratic platform, Gore's law-and-order campaign flows not from the interests of the masses of working people, but from the needs of the wealthy corporate elite, which feels it necessary to shore up the police powers of the state in the face of growing social inequality.



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