

Democrat Gore picks Lieberman as running mate: kowtowing to the Republican right

Barry Grey
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With the selection of Senator Joseph Lieberman as his running mate, Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore has ensured that there will be no significant political differences between the Democratic and Republican candidates in the November elections.

The choice of the Connecticut senator seems to have been dictated by two overriding considerations: first, to pick a vice presidential candidate whose economic and social policies stand at the far right of the Democratic Party political spectrum; second, to placate the Republican and Christian right conspirators who organized the year-long campaign to bring down the Clinton administration.

When the Democratic convention opens next week, there will be a great deal of rhetoric about how the Democrats stand for the working people. But this fraud is exposed by the nature of the two candidates who comprise the party's presidential ticket.

Lieberman made a name for himself by becoming the first Democratic senator to publicly condemn Clinton at the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal and investigation by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. In early September of 1998, following Clinton's grand jury testimony and prior to the release of Starr's sex-filled report to Congress, Lieberman delivered a speech on the floor of the Senate denouncing Clinton for "immoral" conduct and for making misleading statements about his relationship with Lewinsky.

Lieberman's speech fueled the media frenzy, provided much-needed credibility to Starr, and emboldened the House Republicans to impeach Clinton the following December. It came at a time when opinion polls showed overwhelming popular opposition to the Starr witch hunt.

Gore's choice of Lieberman is an obvious attempt to counter the efforts of the Republican Bush-Cheney ticket to portray the Clinton-Gore administration as scandal-ridden and immoral. The Republicans are seeking to

pursue this tactic while at the same time dissociating themselves from the impeachment and Senate trial of Clinton, knowing full well that the episode created enormous hostility among broad layers of the population. Indeed, the political fallout from the impeachment conspiracy resulted in a Republican rout in the 1998 congressional elections and the resignation of Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

Were Gore and the Democrats prepared to expose the threat to democratic rights involved in the Starr investigation—including the lineup of Republican leaders, racist and fascistic elements in the Christian right, media pundits, and reactionaries in the federal judiciary extending to the chief justice of the Supreme Court—they would place the impeachment conspiracy at the center of their campaign. Such an exposure would undoubtedly rally powerful support in the electorate.

However, any such appeal to popular concern over democratic rights is foreclosed to a party that defends the existing economic and political system, and has ever more openly adapted itself to the right-wing policies of the Republicans. Gore's selection of Lieberman is consistent with the Democrats' posture both during and after the failed attempt to force Clinton from office. Beginning with Clinton, the main concern of the Democrats has been to conceal from the American people the assault on democratic rights that underlay the impeachment affair.

When news leaked of Gore's choice of running mate, Clinton went out of his way to praise Lieberman, telling reporters, "I think he is one of the best speakers in public life. He is just an extraordinary guy."

Contrary to Gore's opportunistic calculations, the addition of Lieberman only legitimizes the Republican impeachment drive and lends credence to their charade of moral superiority. The broadcast media responded to the news of Lieberman's selection by repeatedly showing clips from his 1998 Senate speech denouncing Clinton.

This latest maneuver is entirely in character for Vice President Gore. Just last March he publicly broke with the policy of his own administration in the Elian Gonzalez case, supporting the campaign of right-wing Cuban exile groups to prevent the boy from returning with his father to Cuba.

As with the Elian Gonzalez affair, Gore's selection of Lieberman underscores the chasm that separates the political establishment from the concerns and feelings of the broad masses of the American people. Gore and his advisers badly miscalculated the popular response to his adaptation to anti-Castro forces in Miami. The public was repelled by his disregard for the elementary right of a parent to be united with his child. Their disgust was registered in a general decline in his standing in the opinion polls.

In the choice of Lieberman, Gore is repeating the same pattern, demonstrating that the “public opinion” to which the political elite responds is the right-wing consensus of the most privileged social layers, which includes the media pundits and the Washington establishment itself.

In his two terms in the Senate, Lieberman has embraced many of the standard planks of the Republican Party, including partial privatization of Social Security, school vouchers and school prayer—putting him at odds on these questions with the stated positions of his running mate.

One need only consult Lieberman's web site to get an idea of the man's politics, and the forces to which he is beholden. The web site boasts that the Connecticut senator is “pro-business, pro-trade, and pro-economic growth.”

It includes the following endorsement from *Washington Post* columnist David Broder: “Sen. Joe Lieberman is an embodiment and an apostle of a Democratic philosophy that incorporates market-oriented thinking of the Reagan revolution and a muscular defense and foreign policy.”

On foreign policy, Lieberman, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, is among the most avid exponents of American militarism. In his first year in the Senate he supported the US invasion of Panama, and little more than a year later co-authored the Gulf War Resolution, becoming one of the few Senate Democrats to vote authorization for the US-led invasion. Another was then-Senator Gore.

More recently he has called for the early construction of an anti-missile defense system. His enthusiasm for military expenditures has ingratiated him with such Connecticut-based aerospace companies as the United Technologies subsidiary Pratt & Whitney.

On domestic issues, Lieberman has been a reliable defender of big business. His web site praises him for “fighting for a balanced budget and fiscal discipline” and “cutting capital gains taxes to spur new investment for American industries.” In support of the Hartford-based insurance giants, he joined with Republican Senator John McCain to amend a product liability bill so as to protect suppliers of raw materials used in the production of medical devices.

He has allied himself with forces seeking to vitiate public education. He voted to expand funding for charter schools and backs tuition vouchers allowing parents to send their children to private schools, including religious schools, at taxpayer expense. He also supports the proposal of George W. Bush to expand tax-free education savings accounts that would be applicable to private as well as public schools.

Lieberman's record on civil liberties is no better. He supports a “moment of silence” in schools, which could be used for prayer. At one point in his political career he advocated allowing military involvement in drug interdiction. A proponent of the death penalty, he co-sponsored the most recent crime bill.

Lieberman was among the most outspoken Democratic supporters of the welfare bill that ended guaranteed federal benefits for the long-term unemployed. He has embraced the Republican rhetoric on so-called family values, setting himself up as the “moral conscience” of the Democratic Party. In this capacity he has joined with the Republican former Education Secretary William Bennett to campaign for a crackdown on record companies and the entertainment industry.

Since 1995 Lieberman has been chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council, the group founded by Gore and Clinton, among others, to shift the party to the right and repudiate its past association with policies of social reform.



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