

Democrat Carl Levin rebuffs Michigan peace activists

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A September 21 meeting between pacifist opponents of the US war drive against Iraq and Democratic Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, provided an object lesson in the futility of basing opposition to war on appeals to the Democrats. It underscored the fact that the Democratic Party is committed to a colonial-style war against Iraq.

The meeting was organized by the Ann Arbor Coalition for Peace and Justice, an umbrella group of academics, churchmen and pacifist opponents of the impending war against Iraq.

Under ground rules negotiated by the coalition and Senator Levin, the meeting was to have included only 10 hand-picked spokesmen for the peace group. However, some 75 protesters turned up at Macomb Community College outside of Detroit, the venue of the meeting. Most carried signs and placards opposing war against Iraq. The size of the turnout clearly disturbed aides to Senator Levin. They felt threatened by the prospect that the senator might have to answer unscreened questions.

Eventually some 30 people, including a reporter for the *World Socialist Web Site*, were allowed into a small meeting room. Protesters who entered had their signs taken away by Levin aides and were told there would be no opportunity for questions from the floor.

Before the arrival of Levin, the spokesman for the coalition, Dr. William Thompson, a professor at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, reminded supporters that only ten predetermined representatives of the group would be allowed to address the senator. He urged everyone addressing Levin to do so with the utmost respect so as not to alienate him.

When the senator finally arrived, 15 minutes late, he was livid. A Levin aide berated Thompson for allowing

the meeting to become a public event. “You breached the agreement we made,” he thundered. “This is a private meeting. We are not prepared to host this many people.”

Levin declared, “Who invited all these folks? Let’s keep the commitment we made. I want to meet with ten people.”

Thompson attempted to pacify Levin, calling him Carl, and assuring him that only handpicked spokesmen from the group would be allowed to speak. Eventually Levin agreed to proceed.

The ensuing “dialogue” demonstrated the political hopelessness of the pacifists. They proceeded as though the plans for war were the result of some sort of misunderstanding that could be cleared up by people of good will. The main argument of many was not so much the prospect of war itself, but rather that the war plans were being made hastily and that the focus on impending war prior to the November congressional elections could upset the Democrats’ chances of winning more seats. No one mentioned the basic motive behind the war drive—the determination of US imperialism to monopolize the oil riches of the Persian Gulf.

Al Fishman, a member of Peace Action, complained that the war drive had driven Enron “off the radar screen.” He advised Levin, “The Democrats have to have the courage to bring it back.”

There was much groveling. “You’re our hero, you’re our champion,” declared a Presbyterian minister. Thompson thanked Levin profusely for coming and apologized for the “disturbances.”

Such bootlicking did not move Levin in the least. He reiterated his support for war against Iraq. “War and peace transcend political parties,” he intoned. “We have to press the UN to take action. Is Saddam Hussein

a threat? I believe that he is. Iraq is threatening to develop nuclear weapons and has repeatedly violated UN resolutions.”

His only difference with the Bush administration was the advisability of obtaining a United Nations resolution before launching an attack. “We need a deadline, ultimatums and use of force authority,” he said.

When the reporter for the WSWS attempted to raise a question, Levin aides brought the meeting to a close and whisked the senator out.

Levin’s behavior—his combination of arrogance and fear—reflects not only the increasingly right-wing politics of the Democratic Party, but also its loss of any mass base of support. This party and its personnel inhabit a world of corporate millionaires, media pundits and state operatives that is utterly removed from the lives and concerns of the broad mass of working people. Its real social base of support is a narrow and highly privileged layer of the middle class and a section of the corporate oligarchy. Hacks like Levin are little more than the paid agents of corporate interests and well-financed political lobbies, which set aside a portion of their investment portfolios to secure the services of senators and congressmen.

The arrogance with which Levin treated his loyal opposition should serve as an object lesson to those who continue to believe that the Democratic Party can be pressured to adopt an anti-imperialist or anti-militarist policy. One can be certain that the good senator behaves more humbly when in the presence of those in the Bush administration, such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who formulate American imperialism’s schemes for world conquest.

Indeed, just a few days before Levin’s encounter with the peace activists in Michigan, the senator presided over a committee hearing at which Rumsfeld testified, giving the administration’s standard compendium of lies, half-truths and threats, none of which were directly challenged by Levin or any of the other Democrats on the Armed Services Committee.



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