Al Gore attacks Bush on Iraq War

Bill Vann
13 August 2003

In his first major policy speech in nearly a year, former vice president Al Gore delivered a broad-ranging critique of the Bush administration's foreign and domestic policies in an August 7 appearance at New York University.

Within the context of official American politics, which virtually excludes any serious discussion of important questions, Gore's address was notable for its relatively direct and caustic appraisal. In reviewing the methods used by the administration to engineer the war against Iraq, attack democratic rights at home and implement a vast transfer of wealth to the rich, Gore outlined the features of what amounts to a criminal conspiracy centered in the White House.

Gore refrained, however, from drawing any fundamental political conclusions from the damning picture of the Bush administration that he himself had painted. His speech implicitly raised serious issues about the American two-party system that Gore chose not to broach openly with his audience.

The thrust of Gore's message was that the Bush administration had systematically lied to the American people in pursuit of a political agenda driven by the ideology of the extreme right and designed to further enrich Bush's wealthy corporate backers.

Euphemistically referring to the claims used to promote the Iraq War as "false impressions," Gore presented a litany of White House lies:

"Saddam Hussein was partly responsible for the attack against us on September 11 ... Saddam was working closely with Osama bin Laden ... Saddam was about to give the terrorists poison gas and deadly germs that he had made into weapons ... Saddam was on the verge of building nuclear bombs and giving them to terrorists ... Our GI's would be welcomed with open arms by cheering Iraqis ... Even though the rest of the world was mostly opposed to the war, they would quickly fall in line after we won and then contribute lots of money and soldiers to help out..."

The evidence, Gore said, demonstrated that every one of these pretexts was false. He pointed to the recently released findings of the Congressional investigation into September 11, which established that there had been no link between Iraq and the attacks on New York and Washington, as well as the forgery of documents used to allege that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from Niger.

"As for the cheering Iraqi crowds we anticipated, unfortunately, very unfortunately, that didn't pan out either, so now our troops are in an ugly and dangerous situation," Gore said, adding that "US taxpayers are now having to spend a billion dollars every week" to finance the occupation of Iraq.

The former vice president charged that the same species of "false impressions" had dominated the administration's presentation of its economic policy, promoting the illusion that massive tax cuts for the rich would "create lots of new jobs" and sufficient growth to offset ballooning deficits. Another deception was the claim that "most of the benefits would go to average middle-income families, not to the wealthy..."

Here too, Gore said, every claim had proven false: "Instead of creating jobs, we are losing millions of jobs—net losses for three years in a row. That hasn't happened since the Great Depression.... And it turns out that most of the benefits actually are going to the highest income Americans..."

He quoted George Akerlof, the 2001 winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics, who recently told the German magazine *Der Speigel* that Bush's economic policy amounted to a "form of looting" and called the Bush administration "the worst government the US has ever had in its more than 200 years of history."

Gore accused the administration of carrying out a "systematic effort to manipulate facts in service of a totalistic ideology that is felt to be more important than the mandates of basic honesty." As a result, he declared, "powerful and wealthy groups and individuals who work their way into the inner circle—with political support or large campaign contributions—are able to add their own narrow special interests to the list of favored goals without having them weighed against the public interest.... And the greater the conflict between what they want and what's good for the rest of us, the greater the incentive they have to bypass the normal procedures and keep it secret."

As an example, he cited the secret meetings between Vice President Cheney and the executives of US energy conglomerates in 2001. Cheney and the administration have refused to release the names of those who participated, or reveal whether the company the vice president headed before the election, Halliburton, was represented.

Implying that personal gain and vested interests at the highest levels of the Bush administration played a direct role in the formulation of the government's energy policy, he said, "But of course, as practically everybody in the world knows, Halliburton was given a huge, open-ended contract to take over and run the Iraqi oilfields—without having to bid against any other companies."

Gore went on to indict the administration for stonewalling the bipartisan commission formed to investigate September 11 and called attention to press reports that Bush was specifically advised more than a month before the attacks on New York and Washington that Al Qaeda was planning to hijack airplanes in order to carry out terrorist strikes on US soil.

The former vice president charged that the same modus operandi of secrecy and deceit was evident in the administration's environmental policy.

A recurrent theme in Gore's speech was the subversion of democratic norms and constitutionally protected rights. He accused the Bush administration of "frustrating the normal and healthy workings of our democracy" and using tactics "that deprived the American people of any opportunity to effectively subject his arguments to the kind of informed scrutiny that is essential in our system of checks and balances." He condemned the abrogation of democratic rights in the name of fighting terrorism, including the administration's assertion of the right, based on the president's say-so, to imprison US citizens without charges, a trial or the right to legal counsel.

The implications of Gore's speech were unmistakable. The US government has been taken over by a clique that rules through methods that are thoroughly antidemocratic and unconstitutional. It uses its power to carry out preemptive wars abroad and loot the economy at home for the benefit of a powerful and wealthy elite. It employs misinformation to cover its tracks, while amassing unprecedented police-state powers.

© World Socialist Web Site

Gore's description of the Bush administration, as far as it went, was accurate. But it raised questions that Gore made no attempt to seriously address. How was it possible for such a state of affairs to arise? Where was the Democratic Party when these policies were being implemented? Why did Gore's party, which claims to represent the interests of the common man, allow the Republican right to ride roughshod over the basic interests and rights of the American people?

Gore's gesture toward addressing such questions was a lame evasion. "Maybe one reason that false impressions have played a bigger role than they should," he said, "is that both Congress and the news media have been less vigilant and exacting than they should have been in the way they have tried to hold the administration accountable.... It seems obvious that big and important issues like the Bush economic policy and the first preemptive war in US history should have been debated more thoroughly in Congress..."

Obvious indeed! So obvious that Gore's pose of puzzlement over the lack of any significant opposition from the Democratic Party cannot be taken seriously.

The Democrats are, in fact, complicit in the campaign to deceive the American people and justify military aggression against Iraq. They have capitulated on every major political question—from tax giveaways to the rich, to cuts in social programs, to unprecedented attacks on democratic rights.

The Democratic Party, it should be recalled, controlled the US Senate from the end of May, 2001 until January of this year, during which time it provided indispensable support for the antidemocratic Patriot Act as well as the congressional resolution authorizing Bush to carry out his preemptive war against Iraq.

Nor did the reactionary policies of the Bush administration, as one might surmise from Gore's speech, come out of the blue. The preceding Clinton-Gore administration presided over the Democratic Party's final repudiation of the social reformism with which the Democrats had been identified in an earlier period. It oversaw an escalation of American militarism, launching US bombings or interventions against Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Somalia. Its actions helped pave the way for the political agenda that the Bush administration is now so ferociously pursuing.

Gore himself played a crucial role in delivering the White House to those whom he now indicts. He adapted himself to the impeachment conspiracy against Clinton and, in the 2000 election, despite having won half a million more votes than Bush, quickly acquiesced in an electoral coup by the allies of the Republican right on the US Supreme Court, which halted the counting of votes in Florida and installed Bush in the White House.

Since the 2000 election, the policy of Gore's party has centered on concealing the real implications of the Bush administration's policies from the American people and covering up for its crimes.

Gore himself is neither a political innocent nor an independent actor. The former vice president is the son of a US Senator and scion of a prominent political dynasty. He knows far more than he chose to reveal in his New York University speech, including the fact that the Republican Party and the Bush administration are beholden to forces of an outright fascistic character—from the Christian fundamentalist right, to unreconstructed white supremacists and anti-Semites, to gun-crazed terrorist elements, to forces in the corporate elite who consider any restraints on private wealth and profit an intolerable infringement on the prerogatives of capital.

Gore's interventions are carried out in consultation and coordination with powerful elements within the corporate and political establishment. In the final analysis, he serves sections of the same financial oligarchy that propelled Bush to power and has backed his policies.

This is underscored by the circumstances surrounding Gore's last major policy speech prior to his August 7 appearance in New York. In September of 2002, he appeared before an audience in San Francisco and attacked the Bush administration's doctrine of preventive war, as well as its specific rationale for employing this policy against Iraq. He declared at that time that the greatest fear internationally was "Not about what the terrorist networks are going to do, but about what we're going to do."

The speech earned him the blistering censure of the Bush administration and the corporate media, as well as the stony approbation of his own party's leadership.

Gore's remarks at that time cut across a broad consensus within the ruling elite to invade and occupy Iraq, in the hope that a quick and successful war, followed by a relatively painless occupation, would reap both long-term and short-term benefits. Washington and Wall Street have long coveted Iraq's rich oil resources, and the demise of the Soviet Union encouraged those sections of the establishment that had been pushing for direct US military and political control of the Persian Gulf. There was, as well, the hope that war in Iraq would divert attention from the mounting crisis at home and provide a quick fix for an increasingly ominous economic situation.

Gore got the message. Once those upon whom he based his hopes of mounting a new bid for the White House expressed their displeasure, he accepted their verdict and announced in December of last year that he would not stand as a presidential candidate in the 2004 election.

So why is he back? Gore's speech came only one day after former New York governor Mario Cuomo publicly urged him to seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004. Despite Gore's repeated assurances that he is not a candidate, the New York University speech had all the trappings of a campaign appearance, with the former vice president speaking against a backdrop of US flags and following up his remarks with a handshaking foray through the crowd and a kiss from his wife Tipper.

If Gore is once again testing the political waters for a possible second run for the presidency, he is doing so not simply on his own account. Rather, he is acting at the behest of elements within US ruling circles who are well aware of the profound and widespread popular opposition to the Bush administration, and the failure of the Democratic Party to provide a safe channel for rising discontent.

There can be little doubt that he and those behind him sense a sharp shift in the popular mood. The hope for a quick and lucrative war has evaporated amid mounting popular discontent over the daily death toll in occupied Iraq. Hostility to the existing political setup is being exacerbated by growing unemployment lines and widening social inequality. Gore's speech is indicative of deepening divisions and a growing sense in official circles that the Bush administration is in crisis and is politically vulnerable.

It is no accident that the speech came in the midst of the political crisis surrounding the California recall election. The attempt of extreme-right elements in the Republican Party to overturn last November's gubernatorial election in the nation's largest state has had the unanticipated consequence of unleashing forces that have been long suppressed within the straitjacket of a political monopoly exercised by two reactionary bourgeois parties.

Gore's choice of venue for his August 7 speech was significant. The meeting was composed primarily of students and organized by moveon.org, a group that characterizes itself as a "grassroots" movement of "online activists." It represents the left flank of the Democratic Party. This has hardly been the political base of the former vice president, who was a leading figure in the Democratic Leadership Council, a caucus formed in the early 1980s for the purpose of shifting the party decisively to the right.

Gore's turn toward student youth and the layers around moveon.org represents an attempt to breathe life into a party that has become a

© World Socialist Web Site

political semi-corpse. His aim in cultivating such elements is to gain some credibility for the Democratic Party, and provide it with a “left” face in order to better contain the mounting opposition to Bush and prevent an emerging mass movement of social protest from developing along politically independent and socialist lines.

The public reappearance of Al Gore as a “progressive” critic of the Bush administration is a manifestation of a deepening political and social crisis in America, and the fear within ruling circles that not only the Bush administration, but the entire two-party setup is on the verge of breaking apart.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site