

New Hampshire vote shows widespread antiwar, anti-Bush sentiment

Patrick Martin
29 January 2004

The record turnout in the New Hampshire Democratic primary and the dismal fifth-place showing of Senator Joseph Lieberman, the only candidate to identify himself with the Bush administration's war in Iraq, demonstrate the deep-seated antiwar sentiment among wide layers of the American population.

Some 202,000 people voted in the primary, breaking the record set in the hotly contested 1992 primary and approaching the 266,000 votes won by the Democrats in New Hampshire in the 2000 general election, when Gore lost the state to Bush by a narrow 7,000-vote margin. The turnout came in the face of a ferocious mid-winter cold snap.

Lieberman was well known in the state from his 2000 campaign as the Democratic candidate for vice-president and his three terms in the US Senate from nearby Connecticut. He focused his campaign on New Hampshire, passing up last week's Iowa caucuses, renting an apartment in Manchester and spending the entire month in the state.

Despite these advantages, Lieberman won only 9 percent of the vote, less than a quarter of the vote won by Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, the primary victor (39 percent), and trailing former Vermont governor Howard Dean (26 percent), former general Wesley Clark (12 percent) and Senator John Edwards of North Carolina (12 percent). According to exit polls, Lieberman did well in only one subcategory of voters: Republicans who changed their registration the day of the primary to vote for their favorite Democrat. Even among pro-war Democrats, he lost to Kerry.

There was widespread speculation in the media that Lieberman would be compelled to end his campaign soon, perhaps even before the next round of voting, which takes place February 3 in seven primaries and caucuses. If this proves true, Lieberman will join Congressman Richard Gephardt, the other avowedly pro-war candidate, on the sidelines of the Democratic Party presidential contest. Gephardt wound up his campaign after a poor showing in last week's Iowa caucuses.

Popular opposition to the war with Iraq propelled Howard Dean from relative obscurity to front-runner status among

the Democratic candidates last year. Senator Kerry, who has now superseded Dean as the leader in the polls, has sought to adapt himself to antiwar sentiment as well, downplaying his own vote for the congressional resolution authorizing Bush's attack on Iraq and criticizing the Bush administration's handling of both the war and the occupation. Clark and Edwards have taken much the same posture, and both Kerry and Edwards voted last fall against an \$87 billion appropriation to finance the US occupation regime.

The surge in support for the Kerry campaign is in large measure the product of efforts by the Democratic Party establishment, with the support of the major media, to channel antiwar sentiment behind a candidate deemed more politically reliable than Dean, the former governor of a small New England state who has made sharp-tongued attacks on "Washington Democrats" as well as on the Bush administration.

Kerry has sought to differentiate himself from Dean, not on the war itself, but by presenting himself as more "electable," a stance that means very different things to different people. For the political and media elite, "electability" is a code word for moving to the right and reassuring the ruling class of one's fundamental loyalty. Dean's direct opposition to the Bush administration's decision to attack Iraq is, as the *Washington Post* declared in a December 17 editorial, "beyond the mainstream," even though tens of millions of people opposed the war.

Among the working people who voted for Kerry—he led Dean among every income group, including low-paid workers, union members and professionals—the desire for an "electable" candidate is a measure of hostility to the Bush administration and its policies. (In one of the remarkable findings of the exit polls in New Hampshire, nearly half of those voting—46 percent—described their attitude to the president as one of "hatred.")

The volatility of the polls in both Iowa and New Hampshire demonstrates the willingness of voters to shift their support from candidate to candidate in search of a

supposedly viable alternative to Bush, especially given that there are few significant differences among the leading Democrats. (Another finding of the exit polls was that more of Kerry's supporters voted for him as the best hope of beating Bush than because they shared his views on issues.)

It was noteworthy that the last days of the New Hampshire campaign saw Dean and Kerry almost change places on the war issue, as Dean sought to adapt to the media barrage that followed his emotional concession statement in Iowa. Dean boasted that he had supported the 1991 Persian Gulf War, waged by Bush's father, and criticized Kerry for opposing the first Iraq war and then supporting the second. In a similar effort to appease his establishment critics, Dean emphasized his support for a balanced budget and criticized Kerry and Edwards from the right on taxes and social spending.

In the aftermath of his second-place finish in New Hampshire—where he fell more than 20 points in the polls in the course of the month—Dean drastically revamped his campaign organization, dismissing campaign manager Joe Trippi, architect of his use of the Internet, and replacing him with Roy Neel, a former aide to Al Gore.

Trippi reportedly had urged Dean to essentially ignore the February 3 contests and focus on later primaries and caucuses in Michigan, Washington and other states where he had more support. Dean and Neel opted to continue a 50-state campaign, even though that required imposing a two-week pay freeze for campaign staff to conserve money for advertising.

Neel worked from 1994 to 2000 as chief executive of the US Telecom Association, a lobbying organization in Washington for telecommunications monopolies like Verizon. His appointment makes nonsense of Dean's claim to be running a campaign directed against the domination of big corporate interests in Washington.

At the same time, Dean resumed his criticism of the Bush administration over Iraq, declaring that the White House "did cook the books" in its claims that Iraq possessed a stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. The conduct of Vice President Richard Cheney, who made a personal visit to the CIA to browbeat analysts into a more alarmist assessment of Iraq's weapons programs, "raises serious questions about the truthfulness of both the president and vice president on the way to the Iraq war," he said.

In the wake of Kerry's back-to-back victories in Iowa and New Hampshire, leading Democratic Party officials have rallied around his candidacy. On Thursday, Congressman James Clyburn of South Carolina, the state's top black Democrat, announced his endorsement of the Massachusetts senator. Clyburn is one of many Gephardt supporters who have shifted to Kerry.

Don Fowler, former chairman of the Democratic National

Committee, said that only Edwards could provide a roadblock to Kerry's nomination, adding that if Kerry won February 3 in South Carolina, where Edwards was born, the contest would be effectively over. "I can't conceive of a set of circumstances unless something catastrophic happens to Kerry," Fowler said.

Donna Brazile, the campaign manager for Gore in 2000, praised Kerry's campaign, adding that after two defeats, "I don't believe Dean can recapture his old momentum."

Even more significant were the comments of Terry McAuliffe, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who suggested that candidates who had not won a primary or caucus by February 4 should pull out. "If you haven't won in one of the nine states in all the regions of our country, with all the different constituencies involved, then I think it's time to reassess your candidacy," he said.

This was clearly directed at Dean, whose campaign has indicated that it has few expectations of victories February 3, which will see contests in Delaware, South Carolina, Missouri, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona and North Dakota. Along with New Hampshire and Iowa, these are all among the less populous and more rural states. (Bush carried six of these states, and his combined margin of victory in the nine was over 750,000 votes, although he lost the nationwide popular vote in 2000 by more than 600,000.)

By February 4, the cutoff suggested by McAuliffe, only 7 percent of the convention delegates will have been chosen and none of the 10 largest states will have voted: the first of these, Michigan, votes February 7, while California, New York and Ohio vote March 2, and states like Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas and Illinois vote even later.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact