

# How Joe Lieberman won the Democratic presidential nomination

Bill Van Auken  
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The ballots have been counted and, for all intents and purposes, the Democratic primaries are over. In a stunning come-from-behind upset, a clear winner has emerged—Senator Joseph Lieberman.

True, Lieberman failed to receive more than 5 percent of the vote in most of the states in which he contested the nomination—including his home state of Connecticut—and did not even put his name on the ballot in a number of primaries because of lack of support. His efforts produced not a single Lieberman delegate for the party's upcoming convention in Boston. Yet he is a winner nonetheless, as it is his right-wing, pro-war politics that will serve as the fundamental platform of the Democratic Party in the 2004 presidential election.

Lieberman was the sole Democratic candidate to identify himself enthusiastically with support for the war launched by the Bush administration against Iraq. His dismal showing in state after state was itself an unmistakable barometer of the mass antiwar sentiment that dominated among the Democratic primary voters.

The Connecticut senator proclaimed that there existed “not an inch of difference” between himself and Bush on Iraq and insisted that he had been for “regime change” long before Bush came to office. The invasion and occupation of Iraq, he said, represented “a heroic and historic cause.”

His most common criticism of the Republican administration's policy in Iraq was what he described as a failure to deploy enough US troops there.

Such views were wildly unpopular with Democratic voters—polls showed more than three-quarters of those participating in the primaries against the war. Lieberman was forced to drop out as a candidate in early February, after gaining less than 3 percent of the vote in South Carolina.

So how is it that, having been decisively repudiated through the primaries in which some 10 million Democratic voters participated, Lieberman's pro-war policies are now being adopted by the party? He may not be the presidential nominee, but, for practical political purposes, he might as well be.

The answer to that question entails a devastating exposure of the fundamentally undemocratic character of the American two-party political system. The Democratic primaries, and indeed the entire electoral process, have been turned into a stage-

managed affair in which political parties and a mass media that serve and are controlled by a tiny financial elite systematically deny the right of the American people to determine any essential question of government policy affecting their lives.

The massive antiwar sentiment initially found distorted expression in the meteoric rise in the polls of former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, who—seeking a leg-up over his rivals—adopted an angry tone of condemnation in relation to the Bush administration having dragged the American people into the invasion and occupation of Iraq based upon lies.

Dean was at pains to explain that, despite his criticisms of Bush, he would not as president order the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Nonetheless, concerns grew within ruling circles that his candidacy could strengthen popular opposition to a US occupation that is seen as vital to maintaining the strategic interests of American capitalism.

In the run-up to the first primaries, the media and his Democratic rivals mounted a relentless attack aimed at casting Dean as unelectable. The principal beneficiary was Kerry, who had voted for the resolution authorizing the Bush administration to launch the Iraq war.

To extent that there are differences between Kerry and Bush over the US colonial venture in Iraq, they are fundamentally of a tactical character. Even these, however, have grown increasingly muted as Kerry has consolidated the delegates needed to make him the party's nominee.

The establishment media, acutely sensitive to the concerns of the US ruling elite, began a steady drumbeat in relation to Kerry's position on Iraq as soon as it became clear that the Massachusetts senator would be the Democratic candidate. The aim was to mute even tactical differences and to assure that a fundamental continuity would be maintained should the Democrats win in November.

Thus, the *Washington Post* published an editorial on February 15 declaring: “Mr. Kerry should clarify what he believes should be the objectives of the U.S. mission in Iraq going forward—and what military and aid commitments he is prepared to make...Mr. Kerry spoke of ‘completing the tasks of security and democracy’ in Iraq. But he hasn't yet offered a realistic plan for how he would do it or committed himself to the likely cost in American troop deployments and dollars. If he is to

offer a credible alternative to Mr. Bush, he must explain how he would manage the real and dangerous challenges the United States now faces in Iraq—without the fuzzing.

On the same day, Thomas Friedman, the *New York Times*' senior foreign affairs analyst who served as a leading propagandist for the US invasion of Iraq, wrote a column that presumed to put the words in the candidate's mouth that Friedman said he hoped to hear:

"If I am president, I will not cut and run. I will not pull our troops out in the face of your intimidation the way Ronald Reagan fled from Lebanon....The best way to endanger [US troops] is to suggest to the terrorists that there is daylight between me and President Bush—that if he won't run, I will. Well, there is no daylight on ends. A Kerry administration will see that Iraqis get every chance to produce their own representative government."

And on March 19, *Washington Post* international affairs columnist David Ignatius published a column entitled "How Kerry can pass the Iraq test." It stated that Kerry must declare that "he wants success in Iraq and will do everything he can, as candidate and president, to make it happen. He needs to make clear that failure isn't an option for him any more than for Bush."

Ignatius continues: "In that sense, Kerry needs to take Iraq off the table as an issue. His advisers may say that's crazy—to throw away the biggest weapon against Bush. But that understates the gravity of this election. Kerry's best shot is that he would be a stronger, smarter leader in wartime. On Iraq, he should tell the truth: Now that we've gotten in, we have to stay..."

Appearing on Fox News last week, Lieberman himself gloated over the fundamental unity of the Democratic and Republican candidates on the issue of Iraq. "Senator Kerry and President Bush both made speeches on foreign policy this week," he said. "If you look beyond the rhetoric and the media attempts to find differences, both of them, obviously, want to win the war on terrorism, both of them want to succeed in Iraq."

In short, Democrats and Republicans are united in their determination that the American people will not be allowed to vote on the most burning political issue that confronts them: the illegal war in Iraq that has claimed the lives of nearly 590 US soldiers, left thousands more wounded, and killed and maimed countless thousands of Iraqis.

Moreover, Kerry has adopted the campaign strategy suggested by the right-wing media pundits, attacking Bush largely from the right, calling for adding another 40,000 active duty troops to the US Army and demanding a stepped up war in Afghanistan and a more aggressive policy of confrontation with North Korea.

The attempt by a substantial section of those who opposed the war in Iraq to realize their antiwar objectives by participating in the Democratic Party's grossly manipulated primary campaign

has reached a complete dead end. Yet there are those who continue to insist that the reversal of the reactionary, anti-democratic and militarist policies implemented by the Bush administration can be achieved through a Kerry victory in November.

An incident at one of the antiwar protests held last weekend underscored the bankruptcy of this position. A high school student who addressed the rally in Lansing, Michigan pointed out that Kerry had voted to authorize the Iraq war. The response from a significant section of the crowd was to boo the speaker for stating what they saw as an unpleasant fact.

There are still many people in America who want to find an easy, ready-at-hand solution to what are profound historical problems that are rooted in the contradictions of American capitalism and a bourgeois two-party system that politically disenfranchises all but the wealthy and powerful.

They desperately cling to the illusion that the Democratic Party can somehow emerge as the party of peace and the defender of the "little guy", despite all the evidence to the contrary.

Willful suspension of disbelief may be advisable when watching a Hollywood movie, but in politics, it can only lead to catastrophe. Those promoting a Kerry presidency today must take political responsibility for the policies that such an administration implements should it take office in 2005. Kerry, no less than Bush, is committed to upholding the profit interests of US-based banks and corporations with all that this entails in terms of military aggression abroad and attacks on jobs, wages and social conditions at home.

The Democratic primaries have provided the clearest possible verification that this party is incapable of reflecting the popular will or providing any essential political alternative to the Republicans. The two-party political system has been perfected over an entire historical period into an instrument for assuring that America's financial elite maintains its political monopoly and preventing any serious challenge to the profit system.

The struggle against war, social inequality, unemployment and poverty can be carried forward only through a decisive break with the Democratic Party of Kerry and Lieberman and the building of a mass, independent socialist party. The Socialist Equality Party is running in the 2004 election to lay the political foundations for the creation of such a genuine political alternative.



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