

# Statement of the Socialist Equality Party presidential candidate **Kerry-Edwards: Democrats finalize their pro-war, millionaires' ticket**

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*The following statement was issued by the presidential candidate of the SEP in response to John Kerry's announcement Tuesday that his former rival for the Democratic presidential nomination, North Carolina Senator John Edwards, will be his running mate.*

With the selection of Senator John Edwards as its vice presidential nominee, the Democratic Party has assembled a pro-war ticket composed of two multi-millionaires.

The choice of Edwards as Kerry's running mate marks another step in the political disenfranchisement of huge numbers of voters. They include the many thousands who participated in the Democratic primaries earlier this year, mistakenly seeing in the party's nomination process a means to end the criminal war initiated by the Bush administration against Iraq.

With polls showing substantial majorities opposing the war and nearly half of the population—and a clear majority of Democratic voters—calling for the immediate withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, the Democrats are fielding two candidates who are every bit as committed as Bush to continuing Washington's colonial enterprise and the daily carnage suffered by the Iraqi people as well as the US troops sent to occupy the country.

The media reaction to the Edwards choice was predictable: a barrage of banalities about the wealthy trial lawyer's supposed "fresh-faced charisma" and "southern appeal." Whatever role such cosmetic calculations played in the decision to tap Edwards, they were entirely secondary. The principal consideration was that Edwards is a man whose political views are fully in sync with the interests of America's financial oligarchy.

With Edwards' personal wealth estimated as high as \$60 million and the Kerry family fortune reaching into the hundreds of millions, the Democrats have managed to field a ticket that leaves George Bush the poorest candidate from either major party running in the national election. Nothing could more clearly expose the tattered myth that the Democrats are the "party of the people." The Kerry-Edwards ticket demonstrates once again the iron grip of big money over the entire US two-party system.

Edwards was a co-sponsor of the 2002 legislation granting the Bush administration a blank check to launch the unprovoked war against Iraq, a measure also supported by Kerry. He was among the most vociferous in proclaiming the supposed imminent threat posed by Saddam Hussein's non-existent "weapons of mass destruction."

Six months before the war began, Edwards distinguished himself by arguing against those who demanded that the Bush administration obtain UN sanction for its military aggression. The US could "not tie

our own hands by requiring Security Council action," he wrote in September 2003, warning his Senate colleagues not to "try to micromanage a war from Capitol Hill." In other words, Congress was obliged to cede to Bush unlimited powers to launch a war based on lies that Edwards himself helped spread.

During the Democratic primaries, Edwards, like Kerry, claimed that he had been deceived by the Bush administration and vaguely adapted himself to antiwar sentiment in order to better derail the campaign of Howard Dean, which had attracted a layer of supporters seeking to make the war the central issue in the 2004 election. They worked out a division of labor with Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, the candidate who most openly supported the war—and consequently the least popular in the Democratic field.

Significantly, all three—Kerry, Edwards and Lieberman—are members of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the right-wing Democratic Party organization that has championed the Iraq war as well as reactionary social policies that are virtually indistinguishable from those advanced by the Republican Party.

Now, both Kerry and Edwards have publicly embraced the policies on Iraq—thoroughly rejected in the primaries—of Lieberman, who was at that time the DLC-endorsed candidate. More recently, Kerry penned an opinion piece for the July 4 *Washington Post* arguing for more troops to deal with the popular resistance to the occupation.

Like the Bush administration, the DLC predicates its foreign and military policy on the pretense that the US is engaged in a global war on terrorism that will last for decades. Its principal document on these issues declares, "We reject the left's perennial complaint that America spends too much on the military. This is no time to cut the Pentagon's budget." This, under conditions in which the Pentagon's official budget has ballooned to \$455 billion and estimates of real US military spending range higher than \$700 billion.

Edwards, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has distinguished himself in these circles by arguing that the Bush administration has not taken stringent enough measures regarding "homeland security." Like Kerry, he voted for the USA Patriot Act, the legislation that has been used to initiate sweeping attacks on basic democratic rights. He goes even further, however, arguing for the creation of the country's first "domestic intelligence organization," commonly known in other countries as the political police.

The Democrats propose to use Edwards to make a quasi-populist appeal for votes. They invoke his "humble origins"—his father was a supervisor in a textile mill—and his folksy rhetoric, cultivated during his years as a personal injury lawyer, when it was employed to win

multi-million-dollar judgments and huge lawyer's fees. In announcing his selection of Edwards, Kerry evoked the North Carolina senator's primary-season rhetoric about "the great divide in this country—the 'two Americas'—that exists between those who are doing well and those who are struggling to make it from day to day."

Aside from the fact that both Kerry and Edwards stand quite firmly on the side of the divide that is doing more than well, this populism is empty and cynical. It is impossible to oppose the attacks on working people in the US while supporting the predatory war being waged by the Bush administration in Iraq. These are two sides of the same political agenda, one that is aimed at further enriching the corporate and financial elite by plundering the resources of both the US and the world.

The war in Iraq, and the so-called "war on terror" of which it is supposedly a part, both of which Kerry and Edwards support, provide a rationale for diverting hundreds of billions of dollars from desperately needed domestic needs to military spending and an unprecedented buildup of police and security forces. The price is being paid by the working people, who are seeing what remains of health care benefits, public education subsidies and retirement programs gutted to finance the ever-expanding military budget. At the same time, the eruption of US militarism abroad is used to justify an unprecedented assertion of presidential "war-time" powers and a frontal assault on democratic rights.

Kerry and Edwards are incapable of advancing any policies that address the crisis confronting hundreds of millions of Americans as a result of rising unemployment, declining living standards and the destruction of social benefits. Edwards made a point in his primary campaign of attacking his rivals—including Kerry—for promoting the idea of a right to health care. "People need to know the truth about what we can afford and what we can't afford," he protested. The "we" in this case is the ruling elite of multi-millionaires and billionaires whom he represents politically and embodies personally.

In a statement posted on the DLC web site last January, entitled "The right kind of populism," the organization spelled out precisely the limits of the populism practiced by Edwards. It consists, the DLC says, of a "unifying, forward-looking policy agenda that places the national interest, as embodied in the values and aspirations of the great American middle class, above special interests, including those operating through government, who seek to use public policies to feather their own nests."

This is the kind of "populism" that lumps together war profiteering by Halliburton with extended benefits for the unemployed or relief for the destitute as "special interests" at odds with the "national interest."

The article contrasts this fraudulent—and therefore acceptable—populist rhetoric with what it terms a populism based on a "reactionary call for class warfare" and a belief that "capitalism itself is fatally flawed."

One would suppose that class warfare is some foreign idea being foisted upon the "great American middle class." On the contrary, a largely one-sided class war has been waged by the financial oligarchy for more than two decades, resulting in the steady transfer of wealth from the vast majority of working people to a relative handful of super-rich. The Democratic Party, aided by the sclerotic scoundrels within the trade union bureaucracy, have worked to assure that no coherent struggle be waged by those on the receiving end of this violent assault.

This effort has gone into high gear with the onset of the election season. The Democrats are using all their political muscle to deny voters the right to support anyone challenging them from the left,

maneuvering to prevent candidates of the Socialist Equality Party as well as other third-party and independent candidates from appearing on the 2004 ballot. The underlying assumption is that if they are successful, those who oppose Bush will have no choice but to cast a vote for the Democratic candidates, no matter how similar their policies are to those of the Republicans.

The differences between the two big business parties are essentially of a tactical character. If Kerry-Edwards are selected to replace Bush-Cheney it will, in the final analysis, represent a change of personnel at the top, carried out in order to more effectively pursue class war at home and military aggression abroad. Former Chrysler corporation chairman Lee Iacocca spelled out the thinking within growing sections of the financial oligarchy by endorsing Kerry and declaring, "The bottom line is simple: we need a new CEO and a new president."

Should such a change take place, millions who voted for the Democrats under the false impression that the replacement of Bush would signal an end to war and the amelioration of unemployment and social deprivation be cruelly disappointed, and will quickly find themselves in conflict with the new government.

The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2004 election to prepare for the inevitable social and political struggles that lie ahead, no matter which of these two parties control the White House in 2005. We insist that nothing will be gained by replacing the criminals of the Republican administration with the scoundrels of the Democratic Party.

The interests and desires of the vast majority of the American people find no expression in either of these parties. The working people are politically disenfranchised. Our campaign—that of my vice presidential running mate Jim Lawrence and myself nationally, and those being waged by Senate, congressional and local candidates of the SEP in different parts of the country—offers the only way forward for the tens of millions of working people, students, professionals and youth searching for a new political road in the fight against imperialist war abroad and social reaction at home.

Our campaign starts from the unpostponable necessity of building an independent mass political movement, founded on a socialist program that seeks to unite working people of every country in a common struggle against global capitalism.

We urge all those seeking a means to fight back against the criminal policies of the Bush administration and its Democratic Party accomplices to join our campaign, participate in the struggle to overcome the anti-democratic obstacles to placing our candidates on the ballot, and make the decision to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.



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