

Democrats rubber-stamp Bush victory in Electoral College

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“Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” —Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

So it was Thursday, in the display of opposition by a handful of congressional Democrats to the certification of George Bush’s victory in the 2004 presidential election. The transformation of tragedy into farce was complete: from Al Gore to John Kerry. From the state of Florida to the state of Ohio. From the Democratic Party of 2001, victorious in the popular vote but robbed by the US Supreme Court, to the Democratic Party of 2005, defeated, demoralized and discredited.

And one other substitution: instead of the cowardly capitulation by the entire Democratic Party leadership in the 2000 post-election crisis, a pathetic effort by Senator Barbara Boxer to strike a more “left” pose, even as the Democrats deepen their collaboration with Bush’s policies of war and reaction.

Fifteen minutes into the joint session of Congress, in which the House and Senate sit together as a body to hear the certificates of each state’s electoral votes read aloud, Democratic Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio interrupted the proceedings by formally objecting to the casting of Ohio’s electoral votes for Bush. Invoking the language of the US Constitution, she declared that Ohio’s votes “were not under all of the known circumstances regularly given.”

Similar objections were made by members of the Congressional Black Caucus four years ago to the certification of Florida’s electoral votes. In a scene since made notorious by Michael Moore’s film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, one Democratic congressman after another got up to object to the certification of Florida for Bush, only to be overruled because not a single Democratic senator would join them, as required by the US Constitution. To complete the picture, the presiding officer at the joint session, gaveling down one objection after another, was Vice President Al Gore, performing his last public duty by ratifying the theft of an election which he himself won by 500,000 votes.

This year, however, Senator Boxer, a liberal Democrat from California, voiced her support for the objection to certifying

Ohio’s electoral votes, thus satisfying the constitutional requirement that at least one member of each house must support a protest in order to force a vote. The House and Senate then met separately for two hours of debate. At the conclusion, each body voted overwhelmingly to award Ohio’s electoral votes to Bush: the margin was 74-1 in the Senate and 267-31 in the House of Representatives.

Speaking to reporters before the joint session of Congress, Boxer said, “Four years ago, I didn’t intervene. I was asked not to by Al Gore, and I didn’t. Frankly, looking back on it, I wish I had.” She specifically cited the Michael Moore film—which opens with that devastating depiction of the Democratic capitulation to Bush—saying that when she saw the film last year it provided a visual reminder of this “mistake.”

But if this was mutiny, it was half-hearted at best. Not a single other Democratic senator joined with Boxer in voting to oppose the certification of Bush’s victory, although several made speeches in the debate deploring anti-democratic methods employed by the Republican campaign to discourage or impede voter turnout in minority and heavily Democratic areas in Ohio, Florida and other states.

The Senate debate was perfunctory, with only two Republicans participating, Michael DeWine and George Voinovich, both of Ohio, who defended the performance of the Republican-controlled state government. In the House, however, Republican speakers nearly foamed at the mouth. David Hobson of Ohio said the Democratic objection was “one of the most base, outrageous acts” he had ever seen.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay—currently facing indictment in Texas for campaign law violations—accused the Democrats of a “crime against the dignity of American democracy.” He warned, “A dangerous precedent is being set today, and it needs to be curbed.” DeLay did not say how he proposed to restrict the exercise of a right provided for in the Constitution.

Like Florida in 2000, Ohio was the state whose electoral votes tipped the balance. The margin of Bush’s victory over Senator John Kerry in the Electoral College was 286-252. If Ohio’s 20 electoral votes had been switched to the Democratic Party column, Kerry would have won 272-266, despite losing the popular vote by more than 3 million.

Unlike Florida four years ago, however, the Bush margin in Ohio in 2004 was not so close as to be likely affected by a recount—his lead over Kerry was reported at 137,000 votes on election night, and shrank to 118,000 votes after provisional ballots were counted. Nor did the US Supreme Court or any other judicial body intervene to halt vote counting. There was a full recount of every Ohio county, paid for by the Green and Libertarian parties and ultimately supported by the Kerry campaign, which cut Bush's margin by only 300 votes, according to figures certified by the Ohio secretary of state December 28.

The Democrats conceded in advance that they were not disputing the outcome of the national election, or even the result in Ohio. "This objection does not have at its roots the hope or even the hint of overturning the victory of the president," said Tubbs Jones, who represents a Cleveland district. "I raise this objection because I am convinced that we as a body must conduct a formal and legitimate debate about the election irregularities."

The Democratic staff of the House Judiciary Committee issued a report charging "numerous, serious election irregularities in the Ohio presidential election, which resulted in a significant disenfranchisement of voters." Among the issues raised were failure to supply enough voting machines to predominately minority or heavily Democratic precincts, discriminatory challenges at the polls, and deliberate efforts by Republican operatives to delay or obstruct the voting so as to discourage minority turnout.

Allegations of more pervasive vote-rigging, including systematic tampering with software on electronic voting machines, have been widely circulated on the Internet. But there has as yet been no credible evidence that such methods were successfully employed to steal the election.

Such charges confirm the widespread hatred of Bush and the thoroughly justified popular opinion that this government is capable of any lie and any crime. But they also reveal the major limitation in such anti-Bush sentiment: the illusion that the Democratic Party provides a vehicle for opposition to the policies of the Republican administration.

The truth is, however, that Bush's victory in 2004 must be attributed, not to hijacking of the electoral process as in 2000, when the Supreme Court intervened to put the Republican in the White House, but to the political bankruptcy of the Democratic Party, which offered no alternative.

A leading pro-Democratic Party political operative, Steve Rosenthal of Americans Coming Together, admitted as much in an op-ed column in the *Washington Post* last month. The former top political organizer for the AFL-CIO, Rosenthal headed a massively financed get-out-the-vote campaign which targeted Ohio and other battleground states. He disputed claims that superior Republican mobilization tactics or voter suppression efforts accounted for Kerry's defeat, noting, "Turnout in Democratic-leaning counties in Ohio was up 8.7

percent while turnout in Republican-leaning counties was up slightly less, at 6.3 percent."

Instead, he admitted, the failure was political: "It was skillful exploitation of public concern over terrorism by the Bush team—coupled with Democrats' inability to draw clear, powerful contrasts on the economy and health care—that pushed Bush over the finish line.... The reason Kerry lost the election had much more to do with the war in Iraq and terrorism than the political ground war in Ohio."

In the final analysis, the Democratic Party lost the 2004 presidential election because it embraced the fundamental lie of the Bush administration: that the war in Iraq is part of a "global war on terrorism" forced on the United States by the attacks of September 11, 2001. Rather than appealing to antiwar sentiment, Kerry presented himself as a supporter of the war who had tactical differences with Bush.

This posture was displayed even during the two hours of impotent protest in Congress last Thursday. Senator Hillary Clinton, speaking during the debate over certifying Ohio's electoral votes, declared that weaknesses in US voting procedures undermined US "moral authority" in the world. "People are literally dying in Iraq for the right to have a free vote," she said.

Boxer herself said, "Our people are dying all over the world, a lot from my state, for what reason? To bring democracy to the far corners of the world. Let's fix it here, and let's do it first thing."

The truth is, however, that American troops are not dying to bring democracy to Iraq or Afghanistan. Their deaths are the result of the drive by American imperialism to seize control of oil resources and establish military bases in an area vital to its project of world domination. The ordinary soldiers, like the people of these two conquered countries, are the victims of a criminal war which has exploited the 9/11 attacks in the most cynical fashion.

As for the Democratic candidate in whose name the congressional protest stunt took place, Kerry himself did not even attend the joint session. He was in Iraq, visiting American troops and meeting with US generals, providing a personal demonstration of his support for the war and his adamant opposition to demands for an immediate end to the occupation and the withdrawal of all foreign troops.



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