

Democratic Leadership Council drafts right-wing platform for coming elections

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The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) held its annual convention in Columbus, Ohio, last weekend, outlining its program for the upcoming 2006 mid-term elections and the presidential election in 2008. Speeches at the meeting and documents published in advance indicate that the Democratic Party plans to run an extremely right-wing campaign, particularly on the issues of “national security” and the war in Iraq.

Formed in the mid-1980s, the DLC is a dominant influence within the Democratic Party. It has been the main source of the “new Democrat” movement that has pushed the party to the right over the past two decades.

The main speaker at the convention was New York senator and former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton. Clinton accepted a post to head the council’s new “American Dream Initiative,” in which capacity she will travel the country promoting the DLC’s views. This positions her as the frontrunner for the party’s nomination in 2008. In courting the DLC, Clinton is following in the footsteps of her husband, who chaired the council from 1990 to 1991, before running for office.

Amid speculation that she could seek the same path to the White House, Hillary Clinton used her speech at the convention to dispel any notion that she would ever run as a “liberal” candidate. In using the DLC platform to call for a “cease fire” among the Democratic Party’s different factions, Clinton was sending a clear signal to left forces within the party, such as Moveon.org: Even the slightest nod to anti-war sentiment will be opposed by the party leadership.

Also speaking were several others considered to be potential presidential candidates, including Senator Evan Bayh from Indiana, Governor Tom Vilsack from Iowa and Virginia Governor Mark Warner. Bayh is the DLC’s former chairman, and Vilsack is its current chairman.

Clinton emphasized her commitment to creating “a unified, coherent strategy focused on eliminating terrorists wherever we find them” and “improving homeland defense.” She envisioned a future society in which “we’ve

put more troops in uniform, we’ve equipped them better, and we’ve trained them to face today’s stress, not yesterday’s.” In calling for more troops, she repeated the main criticism that Democrats have directed against Bush’s handling of the war in Iraq—that not enough forces were committed to guarantee victory.

Clinton also endorsed DLC ideas such as welfare reform, implemented by her husband, which has deprived millions of people of government assistance. She called for fiscal responsibility and repeated certain “cultural” themes designed to neutralize opposition from the extreme right. She urged passage of an “enforceable international ban on human cloning” and sounded notes from her recent campaign attacking violent video games. She called for all Americans to come together on the basis of “our faith in God and our shared values,” while pledging to “reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions by promoting family planning and by strengthening our systems of adoption and foster care.”

For Clinton, the speech is the continuation of an attempt to promote her right-wing credentials. In recent months, she has teamed up with former House speaker Newt Gingrich and current Senate majority leader Bill Frist on health legislation that would be amenable to big business. She has taken a post on the Senate Arms Committee to allow her to voice strong support for the war in Iraq and an increase in the number of troops in the military. In January, she made a speech calling for Democrats and Republicans to find “common ground” on the abortion issue.

The proposals advanced by Clinton and the other speakers at the convention were developed in several articles published in the most recent issue of the DLC’s magazine, *Blueprint*.

In the lead article, “How America Can Win Again,” Al From, the DLC’s founder and CEO, and Bruce Reed, its president, voiced full support for the Bush administration’s escalation of militarism under the pretext of a “war on terror.” After September 11, the pair wrote, “for a brief, shining moment, country—not party—was all that mattered....

Four years later, we have won some important victories against terror and tyranny, in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the duty we owe to the victims of Sept. 11—and to the cause of freedom—has not been fulfilled.”

In the event of a Democratic electoral victory, the war would not merely continue; it would escalate. The authors criticized the administration for having “failed to arm us economically and militarily for a war that could go on for decades.... Iraq isn’t the last war we’ll have to fight, and we need a bigger army.” They called for 100,000 additional troops in the US military—a demand that was repeated at the convention itself. This echoes a recent bill introduced by Senate Democrats, including Clinton and former vice-presidential candidate Joseph Lieberman, for an additional 80,000 troops.

From and Reed sought to underscore the fact that on questions of foreign policy, they have no differences with the Republican Party. “Winning the war on terror,” they wrote, “is too important for either side to spend all its time pointing fingers at each other. We’re Americans first, and we should approach this war the way the American people do: They don’t care which party wins, as long as America wins.”

In an accompanying article, “Valuing Patriotism,” Will Marshall, president of the Progressive Policy Institute, a DLC affiliate, wrote that the Democratic Party’s essential task is to forge closer ties to the military. “More than anything else,” he wrote, Democrats “need to show the country a party unified behind a new patriotism—a progressive patriotism determined to succeed in Iraq and win the war on terror, to close a yawning cultural gap between Democrats and the military, and to summon a new spirit of national service and shared sacrifice to counter the politics of polarization.”

While Democrats should criticize the Republicans for mistakes in waging the war—such as not having enough troops—Marshall declared that they should “also attend to the other side of the balance sheet. That side shows that our forces and their allies have toppled one of the world’s most odious tyrants; upheld the principle of collective security; liberated a nation of 24 million; made possible Iraq’s hopeful experiment in representative self-government; and changed the strategic equation in the Arab-Israeli conflict.”

In a section on “Democrats and the military,” Marshall noted with great displeasure that a disproportionate number of officers in the military identify themselves as Republicans. “How can Democrats start healing this breach? For starters, they can speak out against colleges that ban military recruiters or the Reserved Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) from their campuses.”

Marshall also elaborated on the DLC’s conception of a

program of “national service,” begun under President Clinton and his AmeriCorps program. “One way to put service on more young people’s radar screens is to replace the Selective Service System [which registers American youth for any future military draft] with a new National Service System. Such a system would sign up women, as well as men, and encourage them to volunteer for military or civilian service. Another way to enlarge AmeriCorps would be to link federal student aid to national service. Under such an arrangement, only those who agree to serve would be eligible to receive Pell Grants or to apply for subsidized student loans.”

There have been some calls from within the DLC to make this “service system” mandatory, essentially forcing all youth to engage in some form of military or “homeland defense” activity.

Various left-Democrat blogs have denounced Clinton’s speech before the DLC as a capitulation before the right wing of the party and urged a return to the party’s “roots.” However, the views expressed by Clinton and the DLC are merely a continuation of the policy pursued by the party leadership. The Democrats have offered crucial support to the Bush administration in prosecuting the war, carrying out an assault on democratic rights, and pursuing right-wing economic policies.

John Kerry ran for president on the grounds that, unlike Bush, he would be able to win the war in Iraq. Kerry’s loss stemmed from his inability to make any appeal to opposition sentiment. The conclusion that the party drew from this loss, however, was the necessity for moving even further to the right, seeking to intensify its collaboration with the Bush administration.

As anti-war sentiment grows—with recent polls indicating that 60 percent of Americans favor an immediate partial or complete pullout from Iraq—the Democratic Party responds by calling for an intensification of the war effort.

This divergence has deep social roots. The Democratic Party represents a section of the American ruling elite that, whatever its tactical differences with the Bush administration, agrees with the Republicans on all essential questions. This includes the use of military force to establish US global hegemony and the slashing of working class living standards and curtailment of democratic rights at home.



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