

As support for Bush plummets, no alternative from Democrats

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A series of opinion polls released in recent weeks have shown a massive increase in popular opposition to the Bush administration. The US president's approval rating has dropped to barely one third, on a par with that of Richard Nixon on the eve of his resignation over the Watergate scandal.

The latest results published Thursday were from a poll conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* and NBC News, showing only 36 percent of respondents approving of Bush and his policies (compared to 48 percent a year ago). The same poll indicated that 67 percent believe that the US is on "the wrong track."

Congress fared even worse in the same poll, receiving only a 22 percent approval rating, and with over one third of those surveyed describing its members as corrupt.

These results follow a Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll that showed the approval rating for Bush falling to 33 percent and for Congress to 25 percent.

In its own polling, CNN found an approval rating for Bush of just 32 percent.

A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll, meanwhile, showed only 43 percent approval for Bush in the states where he beat Democratic candidate John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election, and 57 percent disapproving of his performance.

Bush managed to top a 50 percent approval rating in only four states—Idaho, Nebraska, Utah and Wyoming—with a combined population of less than 6 million out of nearly 300 million Americans.

The reasons for the massive turn of public opinion against the Bush White House and Congress are plain. The US is now in its fourth year of the illegal war in Iraq, which has claimed the lives of some 2,400 US troops and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians. The same polls show clear majorities saying that the US should never have invaded Iraq and that it should withdraw its troops from the country.

At the same time, American working people at home are facing a frontal assault on their living standards. In the *Wall Street Journal*-NBC News poll, 77 percent said that they were "uneasy" about the future of the US economy.

Soaring gas prices cutting into already falling real incomes have triggered growing outrage. The *Washington Post*-ABC News found 70 percent saying that the "recent price increases

in gasoline" have meant "financial hardship" for their families.

The *Post*-ABC poll numbers showed 74 percent disapproval of the Bush White House's handling of the deepening gas crisis.

Even more revealing was the CNN poll's apportionment of blame, with the largest share—49 percent—citing US oil companies and 38 percent blaming the Bush administration. Less than a third—31 percent—directed their ire at the oil producing countries, only slightly more than the 27 percent who saw the auto companies as bearing a "great deal" of blame for the crisis.

Underlying these figures is more than just outrage at gas prices topping \$3 a gallon. It is the impact of these prices on working class living standards under conditions in which Big Oil CEOs like Exxon-Mobil's Lee Raymond are racking up compensation packages in the hundreds of millions. What the poll numbers reflect is growing anger over the general social polarization and inequality that increasingly pervades every aspect of American politics and daily life.

Most of these polls indicate a double-digit margin in popular preference for the Democrats over the Republicans in the upcoming 2006 midterm congressional elections. A Pew poll showed the Democrats with 51 percent support compared to 41 percent for the Republicans. The *Post*-ABC News survey put the spread at 55 percent to 40 percent, while an AP-Ipsos poll done this month had 49 percent of respondents saying they would rather the Democrats controlled Congress, compared to 33 percent favoring the Republicans.

The most recent poll—*Wall Street Journal*-NBC—contains a curious anomaly, however. While showing Bush's approval rating falling to his lowest ever, it found that the Democratic lead over the Republicans in terms of who should control Congress had dropped to 6 points from the 13-point advantage recorded last month.

Moreover, the poll showed just 33 percent of those surveyed holding a positive view of the Democrats, statistically indistinguishable from the 35 percent positive rating for the Republicans.

Two tendencies are strikingly expressed in these polls: growing popular disquiet and anger, and the alienation of masses of working people from the entire political setup in the

US: the presidency, the Congress and both major political parties.

There is no doubt that millions of voters will go to the polls in November with the principal aim of punishing Bush and the Republicans. And there is palpable fear within the Republican leadership that as a result it could lose control of one or even both houses of Congress, opening up the threat of damaging investigations into the criminal activities of the Bush administration.

But this is by no means certain. As in past mid-term elections, the majority of eligible voters will likely express their hostility to the Bush administration and the entire political establishment by not voting at all.

The Democrats, the ostensible opposition party, offer no political alternative and no means of expressing the genuine popular opposition of millions of Americans to the bipartisan policies of war, attacks on democratic rights and social reaction.

At its recently concluded meeting in New Orleans, the Democratic National Committee made it clear that the party will run on a platform that fails to call for a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq or advance any concrete policy that is opposed to those of the Bush administration. Party leaders blocked even a discussion about the war, indicating that it would have to wait until after the elections.

This echoes the infamous decision made by the Democratic leadership in 2002, on the eve of the last midterm election, to deliver a vote in the then-Democratic-controlled Senate, alongside that in the Republican-led House, in favor of granting Bush open-ended power to launch an unprovoked war against Iraq. The party's principal standard-bearers—Senators Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Harry Reid, John Edwards—all joined in that vote and share responsibility with Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and others in the administration for waging a war of aggression, a war crime under international law.

This vote sealed the Democrats' fate in November 2002. The party's cowardly perspective that it could contest the election purely on domestic issues, while ignoring the impending war, proved a fiasco, resulting in its loss of the Senate and serious setbacks in the House.

This was followed in 2004 by the decision to nominate Kerry and Edwards, both of whom had voted for the war. Over and over again, the party has worked to shield the Bush administration from mass opposition to the war and to prevent the elections from being turned into a referendum on the criminal aggression against Iraq.

Similarly, a decision was taken at the recent DNC meeting not to adopt any position on the issue of immigration, which has brought millions of working people into the streets in recent weeks.

Instead, the party put forward a series of vague slogans dubbed "The Democratic Vision," extolling the virtues of "honest and open government," "security" and "economic

prosperity."

The implications of this platform are plain. Once again the Democratic Party will seriously oppose neither the Bush administration's policy of continued war in Iraq nor its assault on the basic democratic rights and living standards of working people at home.

The immense disconnect that exists between the seething anger of millions towards the Bush administration and the bipartisan agreement on all essential policies between the Democrats and Republicans is a reflection of the unprecedented social polarization that exists within the US. At the top, a thin layer of the super-rich controls both parties, while the working people, who make up the overwhelming majority of the American people, are politically disenfranchised.

The popular demand for an end to the war in Iraq, the opposition to the attacks on working class living standards combined with obscene levels of compensation for CEOs and the growing hostility to the reactionary social policies advanced by both parties can find political expression only through a decisive break with the Democrats and the emergence of a new independent political party of the working class.

Through its intervention in the 2006 elections, the Socialist Equality Party is fighting not merely to win votes—though we will fight for as many as possible—but to lay the political foundations for the emergence of such a movement, armed with a socialist program and capable of leading working people in the coming social struggles. Our candidates stand on a platform that calls unequivocally for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq, for the defense of democratic rights and for far-reaching economic measures to end poverty and establish social equality.

We urge all of our supporters and readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to join us by participating in the campaign to place our candidates on the ballot and helping to make our party's program as widely known as possible.



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