

As Bush's popularity sinks to new lows—a boost from Hillary Clinton

Bill Van Auken, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Senate from New York
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The latest in a series of sinking polls has brought George W. Bush to a record low in terms of his own approval rating and placed him within striking distance of becoming the most unpopular president in US history.

Just 31 percent of the American public approves of Bush's performance as president, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll released Wednesday. An even smaller percentage—29 percent—approves of the administration's handling of the war in Iraq, the issue that weighs heaviest in dragging down Bush's ratings.

Two-thirds of those polled said they had little or no confidence that the Bush White House could end the war successfully, and little more than a third said they believed that the decision to invade Iraq was correct. About two thirds said they did not believe that Bush shared their priorities and that the US was in worse condition today than before Bush came into office.

The poll follows a similar survey done by *USA Today*/Gallup the day before that also recorded a 31 percent approval rating for the US president. Like the *Times*/CBS poll, it indicated a sharp drop in support among those considered by the administration to be its base, with little more than half of conservatives giving Bush a positive rating.

It was under these bleak conditions for the White House that the Democratic senator from New York, Hillary Clinton, came forward to praise Bush at a public appearance in Washington. In a speech at the National Archives on her political career, Mrs. Clinton said of Bush: "He is someone who has a lot of charm and charisma, and I think in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, I was very grateful to him for his support for New York."

While asserting that she had "many disagreements about many, many issues" with the Republican president, she added, "He's been very willing to talk. He's been affable. He's been good company."

Returning to the issue of Bush's response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City, Clinton claimed that Bush had kept his promise to provide New York City with \$20 billion in aid. "He always kept it on track," she said. "He made sure we got the resources that we needed, and I'm very grateful to him for that."

It is not likely that "charm and charisma," "affable" and

"good company" are the words that come to mind for the two thirds of Americans who are opposed to the Bush administration's policies, many of whom loathe the US president for the criminal actions he has taken over the past five years.

What precisely Mrs. Clinton finds charming, affable and good about the American president she failed to say.

A fairly acute description of the president's personal traits was provided not long ago by a prominent Washington psychoanalyst who diagnosed George W. Bush as a "paranoid megalomaniac." In his book *Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President*, Dr. Justin Frank identified in Bush a "lifelong streak of sadism, ranging from childhood pranks (using firecrackers to explode frogs) to insulting journalists, gloating over state executions...[and] pumping his fist gleefully before the bombing of Baghdad."

White House aides have described his behavior as arrogant and abusive, characterized by sanctimonious invocations of his personal relationship with Jesus Christ combined with obscenity-laced invectives against subordinates.

These personal traits are subordinate, but clearly not unconnected, to Bush's policies of aggressive war, torture, domestic spying and the unprecedented transfer of social wealth from the country's working class majority to the multi-millionaires and billionaires that make up its financial elite.

The fact that Mrs. Clinton can describe such an individual as "good company" and "charismatic" speaks volumes about her own personal makeup, and even more about her politics.

As for crediting Bush with playing some exemplary role in relation to the 9/11 attacks, Senator Clinton's views bear little relationship to reality, and even less to the feelings of many New Yorkers. For millions, the questions start with why the Bush administration failed to stop the attacks, which were then used as the pretext for launching a long-planned war against Iraq and conducting sweeping attacks on democratic rights at home.

A poll conducted by the Zogby firm in August 2004 found that 49 percent of New York City residents believed that top officials in the administration "knew in advance that attacks were planned... and that they consciously failed to act." Among black New Yorkers, 63 percent held this view, as did 60 percent

of Hispanics.

As for the response to the attacks, it started with a deliberate cover-up of air quality in lower Manhattan following the collapse of the twin towers, with the White House censoring reports warning of a threat to public health. It continued with the attempt by the administration to rescind \$125 million in federal funding for the treatment of rescue and recovery workers who suffered serious injury or damage to their health in the course of the many weeks spent digging through the rubble of the World Trade Center site.

Most public officials in New York City have accused the Bush administration of shortchanging the city billions of dollars in promised post-9/11 aid. There are also serious questions regarding the disbursement of the aid money that was provided, with much of it apparently going to politically connected firms that suffered no apparent losses from the attacks.

Bush and his administration provoked outrage among New Yorkers with their incessant attempts to exploit the trauma and grief of 9/11, using images of the September 11 attacks to justify right-wing policies and provide the backdrop for campaign commercials.

Why does Hillary Clinton make such improbable claims about the “goodness” and “charm” of George W. Bush? Why does she go out of her way to shore up the discredited web of political lies and deception that the Bush administration attempted to weave around the 9/11 attacks?

In the end, the answer can only be that the political issues that divide the Republican president and the Democratic senator from New York are inconsequential in comparison to their agreement on the fundamental issues that matter to the ruling financial elite. Her remarks undoubtedly express concerns within this wealthy layer that the mass opposition to the Bush administration reflects deep-going social tensions that threaten the political establishment as a whole.

That this financial elite constitutes the real political constituency of both Bush and Clinton is clear. Indeed, her praise for Bush came just a day after it was revealed that the reactionary Australian-born multi-billionaire media magnate Rupert Murdoch is backing Clinton’s re-election campaign and will this summer host a fund-raiser for her by his News Corporation, Inc.

Defending her new-found friendship with the owner and operator of the right-wing political sewers known as Fox News and the *New York Post*, Clinton declared, “He’s my constituent and I’m very gratified that he thinks I’m doing a good job.”

Millions of people in New York and around the country consider Bush and his cabinet a gang of criminals and Rupert Murdoch a malefactor of great wealth who has done more to poison political discourse in America than virtually any other individual. But not Hillary Clinton: She praises the one and rejoices in the political support of the other.

Nothing could more clearly express the commitment of Clinton and the Democrats to pursue the same basic policies as

the Republican administration, no matter what the results of the 2006 midterm elections.

On the same day that Senator Clinton offered her kind words for Bush, the Democratic Leadership Council, which she co-chairs, organized a conference on Capitol Hill to launch a new book advocating that the Democrats run in 2006 on a right-wing policy of militarism.

According to the *Washington Post*, Democratic officials present, including Senator Evan Bayh of Indiana and former Virginia governor Mark Warner, both considered likely presidential candidates, “warned against calls to launch investigations into past administration decisions if Democrats gain control of the House or Senate in the November elections. Instead, they said, Democrats should concentrate on charting alternative policies for fighting terrorism and succeeding in Iraq.”

The issue for them, and for Clinton, is not how the American people were dragged into a criminal war based on lies, but rather how that war can be more effectively pursued.

In his remarks, Bayh declared his support for “proaction,” another name for preventive war. He declared that US policy could not be one of “sitting back in a defensive crouch and waiting” for enemies to attack. Rather, he said, Washington must “strike them before it’s too late.” The political logic of such a policy is not only a continuation of the ongoing slaughter in Iraq, but the preparation of new and bloodier wars of aggression.

Hillary Clinton’s sympathy for Bush and alliance with Murdoch only underscore that the essential conflict in the US is not between the leaders of the Republican and Democratic parties, but rather between the masses of working people and the ruling financial oligarchy that is represented by both of these parties.

In challenging Hillary Clinton in the 2006 election, the Socialist Equality Party aims to give conscious expression to this real social and political division and lay the political groundwork for the emergence of a new mass socialist party that will provide a genuine alternative to the policies of war and social reaction shared by the Democrats and Republicans.

I urge all supporters of the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site* and all those opposed to imperialist war and social inequality to join this campaign and participate in the struggle to place our party on the ballot in New York and other states where we are running candidates.



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