

Hillary Clinton “woos Wall Street” and health industry

Bill Van Auken, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Senate from New York
13 July 2006

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On July 10, the *Financial Times* of London, the authoritative voice of British finance capital, reported that “Hillary Clinton has been cosyng up to Wall Street in recent weeks with a series of meetings with top executives that could help her follow the path blazed by her husband ahead of his first presidential run.”

The article, entitled “Hillary Clinton seeks to woo Wall Street,” notes that New York’s incumbent Democratic senator has become the beneficiary of millions of dollars in campaign fund donations from major Wall Street firms and financiers generally regarded as Republican.

Two days later, the *New York Times* carried a piece entitled, “Once an enemy, health industry warms to Clinton.” The article noted that Clinton has received \$854,462 in campaign funding from the health care industry, the largest amount that the pharmaceutical giants, HMOs and hospital groups have doled out to any politician, with the exception of Senator Rick Santorum, the right-wing Republican from Pennsylvania.

The two reports are both based on a compilation of campaign contributions done by the Center for Responsive Politics, which reports that the New York Democrat has raised a whopping \$27.5 million in the 2006 election cycle. Together, they provide a portrait of a politician who is thoroughly trusted and controlled by the biggest financial interests in the country, indistinguishable on all fundamental economic and social questions from the Republicans she claims to oppose. This is why money is pouring in to her campaign coffers, much of it aimed at buying influence prior to an anticipated run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008.

According to the *Financial Times*, one of her recent forays on Wall Street included a meeting at Morgan Stanley, hosted by its chief executive, John Mack, who gave \$4,000 to her Senate campaign last year. It was the largest donation that Mack gave to any politician, with his only other donation to an individual candidate going to Senator Santorum. In 2004, when he was the co-CEO at Credit Suisse, Mack raised more than \$200,000 for Bush’s reelection, earning him the title of “Ranger,” bestowed on the Republicans’ top big business donors.

Clinton is also planning meetings at Merrill Lynch, Credit Suisse and other major finance houses. According to the *Financial Times*, part of the senator’s outreach to Wall Street is aimed at reassuring top financiers that she is committed to furthering their economic

agenda and to calm any concerns raised by her right-wing nationalist attack on the Bush administration over the DP World of Dubai deal to purchase a company controlling operations at some US ports. According to the paper, she is swearing her allegiance to “free trade.”

In many respects, Hillary Clinton is retracing the same route taken by her husband Bill in the run-up to his successful 1992 campaign for the presidency. While he made a vaguely populist appeal against the “greed” of the wealthy and expressed sympathy for “forgotten middle class” people who “played by the rules” but failed to “get ahead,” he conducted his own series of meetings with Wall Street principals, making it clear that his economic policies would be tailored to the needs of the stock and bond markets.

Once elected, Wall Street CEOs Robert Rubin and Roger Altman were brought in to ensure that the administration did not veer from this commitment. Slashing deficits and downsizing government became the focus of the administration’s fiscal policy. Meanwhile, it carried out the largest-ever cuts in federal domestic social spending, implementing “welfare reform” and other regressive social measures that greatly accelerated the transfer of social wealth from working people and the most oppressed layers of the population to the super-rich.

In his book *The Agenda*, Bob Woodward quoted Clinton saying of his economic policy just weeks after winning the election, “We help the bond market and we hurt the people who voted us in.”

The last vestige of reformism maintained by the incoming Clinton administration was in the area of health care, with Bill Clinton naming his wife Hillary as chair of a President’s Task Force on Health Care Reform. The proposal provoked frenzied opposition from the Republican right, backed by the big health care and drug companies, which financed a lawsuit challenging the legality of the First Lady’s appointment and a subsequent ad campaign aimed at whipping up fear over the proposal and deriding it as “Hillarycare.” The Clintons swiftly caved in to this right-wing, corporate-financed opposition.

As the *New York Times* article makes clear, all has been forgiven from this bitter battle waged 13 years ago. One executive—a Republican who was a key organizer of the campaign to derail the Clinton’s proposal—told the newspaper that the confrontation is seen as “ancient history” within an industry that is the biggest lobbyist in Washington, dispensing some \$356 million in 2005.

The *Times* article attributes this reconciliation to the fact that

Senator Clinton has “moderated her positions from more than a decade ago.” In other words, she has adopted the agenda of the big insurance firms, the hospital associations and the major drug companies as her own, and they are reciprocating with large amounts of cash. One of her key fundraisers, the paper notes, is William R. Abrams, executive vice president of the Medical Society of the State of New York and a prominent Republican. One of the biggest contributors to Clinton’s campaign fund is the drug giant Pfizer, which in the 2004 election directed 70 percent of its donations to Republicans.

The *Times* quoted Republicans expressing exasperation over Clinton’s ability to secure ample funding from corporate interests that have long leaned heavily towards the GOP. “This reveals that Hillary Clinton is a politician more concerned with campaign contributions than policies she claims to support,” Tracey Schmitt, a Republican National Committee spokeswoman told the paper.

What it really reveals is that Clinton is seen within the financial elite as a reliable defender of their interests. They are capable of understanding that the “policies she claims to support,” to the extent that she has attempted to win support by posing as a liberal, are meant merely for public consumption and that, like her husband, she will put the profit interests of Wall Street, the big pharmaceuticals and the rest of corporate America first.

These interests are, after all, her own as well. Since leaving the White House in January 2001, the Clintons have amassed a huge personal fortune. According to disclosure forms issued by the New York Democratic senator last month, the Clintons had an income of more than \$8 million last year, the bulk of it coming from huge “speaking fees” collected by Bill Clinton for addressing audiences put together by corporations and ruling elites both at home and abroad.

This disclosure substantially underestimates the real income of the couple, because it does not require full amounts to be spelled out. For example, Mrs. Clinton was compelled to reveal only that her husband made \$1,000 or more last year off his book deal for his memoir, *My Life*. When it was published in 2004, it was estimated that the book would produce up to \$12 million in income. Similarly, she was required to report only that Clinton made \$1,000 or more for serving as an “adviser” to Yucaipa Companies, a private equity firm run by one of his close associates, billionaire Ronald Burkle.

The Clintons are prime examples and beneficiaries of what some Democrats have demagogically labeled the “culture of corruption,” attempting to portray the shameless sale of government policy and votes to corporate interests through the system of legalized bribery known as “campaign contributions” as an exclusively Republican problem.

In the final analysis, the Clintons’ political and personal evolution reflects more fundamental trends at the base of society, in particular the huge transfer of wealth from the great majority of the American people—those who depend upon a paycheck for their living—to the portfolios of the multimillionaires and billionaires at the top. This process accelerated enormously under the Clinton administration and has continued unabated under George W. Bush. This relentless drive by a narrow, privileged layer to accumulate ever-larger mountains of personal wealth corrupts every aspect of

political life, blocks any solution to pressing social problems and makes any genuine form of democracy impossible.

The corporate and financial stranglehold exercised over political life and social policy in America by means of the two-party system can be broken only through a struggle for the political independence of the working class.

This is why the Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2006 election and the purpose of my running against Hillary Clinton for the US Senate in New York. Our campaign aims to lay the political foundations for the emergence of a mass class-conscious political and socialist movement capable of leading a struggle for needs of the working class against the profit interests that presently dictate all policies, from attacks on living standards and basic rights at home to wars of aggression abroad.

Against the domination of the corporate interests defended by Clinton—a system that has left more than 45 million Americans without any form of health insurance—the SEP’s program calls for placing the health care, insurance and pharmaceutical giants under public ownership to be operated as a public trust, under democratic control, in order to lay the foundations for a system of universal health care based on socialized medicine. This means establishing medical care as an essential human right, provided to all, regardless of income or employment status. The social costs of such a system would be substantially lower than the current dysfunctional setup, both because preventive health care would reduce the number of catastrophic illnesses, and because it would eliminate the vast layer of insurance companies, HMOs and private vendors that now profit from for-profit medicine in America.

There is no denying that such a system is necessary, logical and imminently achievable. But it can be realized only through a political struggle to break the grip of the two big-business parties and the profit system that they defend. I urge all of our readers and supporters to begin this struggle by joining the fight to place the SEP on the ballot in New York and other parts of the country.



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