

Bill Clinton touts his millionaire status at pre-election rally in Detroit

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8 November 2006

Remarks by former President Bill Clinton at an election rally held in Detroit over the weekend underscore an important fact about the social orientation of the Democratic Party.

Touting the record of his two terms as president, he said, “More millionaires and billionaires were created under my administration” than under President Bush. He went on to boast of his own inclusion in the ranks of the very rich, declaring, “I’ve been poor and I’ve been rich. I like rich better.”

Clinton spoke at Wayne State University, only a stone’s throw from working class neighborhoods that have been economically devastated due to plant closures and mass layoffs. Over the past 25 years the city has been transformed into one of the poorest major cities in the United States, known above all for its dwindling population, blighted neighborhoods, homelessness and pervasive social misery.

Michigan currently has the highest unemployment rate in the US, and one in three Detroit citizens lives in a family whose income is below the official poverty line.

None of this appeared to make an impression on the former president, who has cashed in on his White House tenure to the tune of many millions of dollars. Clinton spoke openly as a representative of America’s financial elite, suggesting that he and his party could better defend the interests of the rich than their Republican counterparts because the Democrats were more adept at throwing a few sops to the poor.

In the course of his remarks, Clinton outlined the political implications of his party’s defense of wealth and privilege. He pointed proudly to the large number of former Republicans running as Democrats in this year’s Congressional races, boasting, “We have become the progressive and conservative party of

America.”

He studiously avoided addressing the central question in the elections, the war in Iraq, but he included in a laundry list of Democratic objectives that of securing “victory” over the Iraqi resistance to American domination.

No so long ago it would have been unthinkable for a leading Democratic politician to come to a working class city such as Detroit and boast of his personal fortune. Although always a bourgeois party, there was a time when the Democratic Party, largely through its alliance with trade unions which themselves had a mass base of support in the working class, enjoyed the active support of broad layers of working people and was obliged to hold itself to some extent accountable to that base.

But as the Democratic Party lurched ever further to the right and its popular base of support eroded, it increasingly came to rest on the social layers that enriched themselves over the past quarter century of relentless attacks on the living standards of the working class. Clinton, the multimillionaire product of a lower-middle-class family from the economically backward state of Arkansas, personifies this core social constituency of the Democratic Party today.

The erosion of active working class support for the Democrats was evident at the Detroit rally. Although it had been advertised as open to the public, it was attended by only a few hundred people, overwhelmingly party operatives, union bureaucrats and long-time Democratic Party activists. It was largely ignored by students and workers.

Those on the platform represented a cross section of the privileged layers on which the Democratic Party rests—members of the black upper-middle class, union officials, a smattering of academics, successful

entrepreneurs.

Clinton's remarks underscore the necessity for the working class to break from the Democrats and build a mass socialist movement in opposition to the two-party monopoly and the capitalist system which it defends.



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