

Election campaign reveals Democrats' lurch to the right

Bill Van Auken, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Senate from New York
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With the US midterm elections just a week away, Democratic Party leaders and candidates are waging the most right-wing campaign in the party's history. The essential content of this campaign is a pledge to continue the Bush administration's policies of militarism abroad and social reaction at home.

The Democrats are at pains to reassure America's financial elite that an end to Republican control over one or both houses of Congress will in no way impinge on their wealth or political influence.

According to the latest estimates, the two major parties are expected to spend some \$2.6 billion, making this year's election the most expensive congressional contest ever. Vast sums of corporate money are flowing into the campaign coffers of leading figures in both parties, as US corporate and financial interests hedge their bets, making sure to buy influence on both sides of the aisle.

While seeking to profit from the popular hostility to the Bush administration over the war in Iraq, attacks on democratic rights and the accelerating transfer of social wealth from working people to the rich and the super-rich, the Democratic leadership is sending signals to the ruling elite that it has no intention of seriously challenging any of these policies. Rather, the party is being shifted even further to the right, in terms of both its platform and its candidates.

There is little to distinguish Democratic candidates from their Republican opponents. Thirty three of the Democratic challengers have won endorsements from either the Blue Dogs, a caucus of predominantly southern right-wing Democrats that frequently votes with the Republicans, or from the New Democrat Coalition, the congressional arm of the the pro-war, pro-corporate Democratic Leadership Council, which emerged a decade ago as an opposition within the Democratic Party to what it derided as outmoded "liberalism." A number of these candidates are themselves former Republicans and not a few have made a point of declaring their opposition to abortion rights and same-sex marriage.

There could be no more telling indication of the party's trajectory than this week's endorsement of my opponent, Hillary Clinton, New York's incumbent Democratic senator and frontrunner for the party's 2008 presidential nomination, by Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post*, a tabloid that is infamous for its semi-fascist diatribes against the working class and anyone who dares to challenge the right wing's political agenda.

Illinois Congressman Rahm Emanuel, head of the Democrats' Congressional Campaign Committee, played a major role in selecting the new candidates for the House of Representatives and rejecting others who were viewed as too liberal or too forthright in voicing opposition to the Iraq war.

Emanuel recently published a book (co-authored by the Democratic Leadership Council's Bruce Reed) entitled *The Plan*, which lays out the party's right-wing agenda.

While making little mention of the war in Iraq—despite the fact that it is the overriding question in the current election—this document spells out a policy of stepped-up militarism in the name of "A New Strategy to Win the War on Terror."

The book proposes, for example, a new mandatory program of "universal citizen service" in which "all Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 should be asked to serve their country by going through three months of basic civil defense training and community service." The document hastily adds, "This is not a draft."

This assurance rings hollow when one considers an accompanying proposal for "a new strategy that uses all the tools of American power to make our country safe." The document continues, "We need to fortify the military's 'thin green line' around the world by adding to the Special Forces and the Marines, and expanding the Army by 100,000 more troops."

How this expansion of the military is to be accomplished, the authors do not say. But it is obvious that the introduction of "universal citizen service" in the name of patriotism and shared sacrifice is merely an intermediary step towards reinstating the draft, so as to dragoon young people to serve as cannon fodder in Iraq and other US wars of aggression.

The same document calls upon the government to "protect the homeland and our civil liberties by creating a new domestic counterterrorism force like Britain's MI5"—in other words, by establishing a political policing and spying agency.

It is clear that a Democratic victory in either or both houses of Congress will not produce the repeal of such repressive legislation as the Patriot Act or the Military Commissions Act. It will signal not a rollback of the wholesale attacks on democratic rights carried out over the last five years, but rather their continuation and intensification.

Whatever ambiguity *The Plan* leaves regarding the war in Iraq is cleared up in another book—*With All Our Might: A Progressive Strategy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty*—written by

Democratic Leadership Council founder Will Marshall. It states, “The fact that President Bush and his team have mismanaged virtually every aspect of postwar reconstruction does not justify an immediate or precipitous withdrawal. Instead we should rally the American people for an extended and robust security and reconstruction presence.”

Similarly, the Democratic congressional agenda unveiled by the party leadership last week—“A New Direction for America”—calls for a “tough, smart plan to transform failed Bush Administration policies in Iraq” in order to “defeat the insurgency.”

In other words, the Democratic objective in Iraq is not to end the war, but to salvage the US occupation. The original project of using US military force to overrun a relatively defenseless country and seize control of its strategic oil reserves remains an objective that enjoys broad support within the US ruling elite, and therefore in both corporate-controlled parties.

Moreover, the document calls for the escalation of US military aggression elsewhere, proposing a stepped-up campaign to “finish the job in Afghanistan and end the threat posed by the Taliban” as well as “redoubled efforts to stop nuclear weapons development in Iran and North Korea.”

On the domestic front, leading Democrats have made it clear that they intend no serious departure from the social and fiscal policies that have benefited the richest 1 percent of Americans—the key constituency of both major parties.

Gone are the demagogic calls made in 2004 for reversing the Bush administration’s tax cuts, hiking tax rates for those making a quarter of a million dollars or more, or amending the dividend and capital gains tax breaks enacted in 2003.

New York Congressman Charles Rangel, considered among the most liberal figures in the House of Representatives and poised to become chairman of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee should the Democrats gain control of the House, gave an interview to the media last week in which he pledged that the Democrats would not “retroactively roll back the tax cut” and refused to say what they would do when the tax windfalls for the rich expire in 2010.

As an article in the *Los Angeles Times* on soaring corporate contributions for Democratic candidates made clear, Rangel has benefited handsomely from his pro-corporate politics. The article noted that Rangel has raised \$17,000 from General Electric for the present election, more than double what he received during the previous electoral cycle.

“I don’t think meeting with the chairman of General Electric has anything to do with my taking over Ways and Means,” Rangel joked cynically. “I just never realized how much they loved me.”

Democratic leaders have vowed not to raise taxes and to institute a tight “pay as you go” fiscal regime, meaning that any significant spending increase for health care, education or other essential social needs is excluded.

In another telling indication of the Democrats’ commitment to continuity with the political path pursued by the Bush administration, California Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi, the minority leader who will become speaker of the House if the Democrats win control of the body on November 7, has explicitly ruled out any effort to impeach Bush for crimes carried

out by the White House.

In a “60 Minutes” television interview on October 22, Pelosi declared, “Impeachment is off the table.” Asked by CBS interviewer Leslie Stahl if that was a pledge, Pelosi replied, “Of course it is,” and went on to call impeachment “a waste of time.”

To declare impeachment “off the table” and “a waste of time” before a new Congress even convenes, much less initiates any investigations, is a staggering declaration of cowardice and subservience to the White House.

After all, this is a president who has carried out multiple and grave criminal acts against the American people and the US Constitution that are clearly ample grounds for impeachment. These include launching an illegal war based upon lies, ordering domestic spying without a warrant, authorizing violations of international laws barring torture, and carrying out a wholesale assault on constitutional rights, including the assumption of quasi-dictatorial powers.

If Pelosi rules out in advance any impeachment bid, it is not merely a matter of electoral tactics. Recent polls have indicated that a majority of the public favors impeaching Bush for ordering warrantless wiretapping as well as for dragging the country into the Iraq war on the basis of lies.

The real issue is that the Democrats were willing accomplices in all of the administration’s crimes and have no interest in seeking punishment for the responsible individuals or, for that matter, putting a stop to the illegal actions.

A victory for the Democrats in either or both houses of Congress would bespeak the immense popular hostility towards the policies pursued by the Bush administration. But these policies have been implemented by both parties and are an indictment of the two-party system as a whole.

Such a “victory,” should it occur, will not be the result of a challenge to the Bush administration’s policies of global militarism and social reaction, nor of any genuine appeal to the seething opposition to the Iraq war and the worsening conditions facing masses of working people in the US. Rather, it will register the fact that America’s ruling oligarchy has determined that a partial shift in tactics and personnel is required to better pursue essentially the same agenda.

Whatever the outcome on November 7, the right-wing stance of the Democratic Party in this election campaign has laid bare the unavoidable necessity for a new political alternative: a mass independent party of the American working people, who comprise the vast majority of the population. The Socialist Equality Party is intervening in the 2006 elections to lay the political foundation for such a party and to fight for the socialist and internationalist program that it requires.



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