

“Antiwar” candidate boosts illusions in a pro-war party

Kucinich runs again for Democratic presidential nomination

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Ohio Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich announced Tuesday he is once again seeking the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, preparing to repeat in 2008 the role he played in 2004 as a “left” prop for a thoroughly right-wing, pro-war party.

In announcing his candidacy, Kucinich voiced concern that the Democratic leadership’s continued support for the occupation of Iraq was discrediting the party and placing it on a collision course with tens of millions of voters who repudiated the war in the elections.

“They voted for the Democrats because they expected us to end the occupation and to bring the troops home from Iraq,” he said, but the Democrats had overwhelmingly supported the last \$70 billion appropriation for the war in October and “Unfortunately, our Democratic leaders have already announced they will support an additional appropriation for the war of up to \$160 billion,” he complained. “Not only are we not listening to the voters and taking steps to withdraw our forces quickly, we are actually planning to spend twice as much on the war as we did last year! Somebody didn’t get the message,” he said. “And unfortunately it is the leadership of the Democratic Party, and the consequences may be disastrous for our party, our nation and the world.”

He presented his planned presidential campaign as an effort to win back voters disgusted with the reactionary policies of both big business parties and convince them that they should not lose hope in Democrats and the American political system itself. The Democrats, if pressured from below, would be forced to abide by the will of the people, he claimed, end the war and reverse the right-wing agenda pursued by Bush and the Republicans. “We have a sacred responsibility to keep alive the spirit of our nation, to protect people’s faith in not just our party, but in the political process itself,” he declared.

Announcing his candidacy at Cleveland’s City Hall, Kucinich warned that there was little time left for the

Democratic Party, saying, “Trust in the Democratic Party is on the line. What does it say if only one month after the voters gave us control of Congress on the issue of Iraq, that we turn around and say we will keep funding the war? What kind of credibility will our party have if we say we are opposed to the war, but continue to fund it?”

Making it clear he will to do his best to revive illusions in the decidedly pro-war Democrats, Kucinich said, “There is still time to rescue the people’s confidence in the Democratic Party and their trust in government,” he declared. “But only if someone steps forward quickly to wake the nation and tell the people, to travel to those dozens of cities like Cleveland, to go to the villages, the farms and factories and say: ‘This is the moment to stop the US occupation, this is the moment to end our war against Iraq, this is the moment to bring our troops home...to rebuild our cities, to invest in our children, to restore our environment, to work with the world to create new opportunities through peace.’ ”

Kucinich who has been touring the country with Cindy Sheehan, who lost her son in Iraq and became an outspoken opponent of the war, is calling for Democrats to end funding for the war and for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq within six months.

He is co-sponsoring a House of Representatives resolution that would cut off most spending for the war, but leave funds for the “safe and orderly” withdrawal of troops, economic recovery and international peacekeeping. Introduced by Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, the bill has only 18 co-sponsors and no chance of making it to the House floor for a vote.

The Ohio congressman, who was just elected to his sixth term, is calling for the transfer of authority for the Iraqi occupation from the US to the United Nations, which, he says, should send in 130,000 UN peacekeepers to replace US forces and remain in the Middle Eastern country “until the Iraqi people can maintain their own security.”

In addition, Kucinich has called upon the new Democratic majority to defeat the next war appropriations bill, which is scheduled to come up for a vote in the spring. He noted that congressional approval of consecutive funding bills has “enabled the Bush administration to continue the war with hundreds of billions at his disposal.” Kucinich’s proposal has no support, with Rep. Barney Frank, a supposedly liberal Democrat from Massachusetts dismissing the idea as “silly” and incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other party leaders insisting the Democrats will continue funding the war to “support the troops.”

Kucinich claims this “thinking is likely due for a reappraisal” and that an “earnest debate” was beginning over whether “we close ranks as a party and quickly bring the troops home” or “we ignore the voters’ intent and keep the money pouring into Iraq.” People can influence the outcome of this supposed debate, Kucinich argues, by pressuring the incoming Democratic majority, contacting their congressmen and protesting. He told a reporter for TruthDig.com: “I think it’s important for people to contact their member of Congress, and to let [them] know how they feel.... It’s going to be important for people to organize.... It’s going to take a mass movement to really create such an uproar that approval of the supplemental will be stopped.”

If the Democrats fail to oppose the war-funding measure, he suggested in a statement outlining his proposal (“There Is Only One Way to End The War In Iraq”), this would provoke popular opposition that would rebound upon the Democrats in 2008. The implicit danger, which Kucinich doesn’t state but which preoccupies him and others within the Democratic Party establishment, is that the further discrediting of the Democrats will create the conditions for the emergence a mass independent political movement in opposition to the two capitalist parties—i.e., a socialist alternative.

The Democratic Party is committed to continuing the criminal occupation of Iraq and the escalation of violence against those who oppose US domination of the Middle Eastern country. While sharp tactical divisions exist within the US political establishment, the Democrats are just as committed as the Republicans to the use of military force to secure US domination over the oil resources of the Middle East and to prevent a Vietnam-style defeat in Iraq.

That is why any talk of a rapid withdrawal of US troops and ending the war has been taken off the table in the month after the US elections. The terms of debate set by both the Bush administration and the Democratic leadership concern the best means to crush the popular insurgency against the occupation and secure the interests of US imperialism in the region.

The main purpose of Kucinich’s candidacy is to bolster

fading illusions that the Democrats constitute a “people’s party,” or at least that there is a progressive antiwar faction within it. He urges support for this supposed faction as a means of pressuring the party leadership to adopt an antiwar platform and wage a struggle against Bush and the Republicans. He is joined in this effort by left-liberal forces such as the *Nation* magazine and the “World Can’t Wait” and “United For Peace & Justice” coalitions, which promote the conception that protests and pressure will move the Democrats to the left.

There is a significant element of conscious deception both in Kucinich’s candidacy and on the part of those “left” protesters who seek to lend it credibility.

Anyone seeking an understanding of what role the Ohio congressman will play in 2008, merely has to examine his actions during the contest for the Democratic nomination in 2004, when Kucinich made a similar presidential bid, running as an opponent of the war.

After Democratic leadership pulled the rug out from under the candidacy of Howard Dean, around whom significant antiwar sentiment had coalesced, measures were taken to suppress opposition to the war within the party and to ensure that the election was not turned into a referendum on Iraq. This campaign was consummated through the nomination of John Kerry, who had voted for the war and continued to speak out in support of “victory” in Iraq and even the deployment of more troops.

In response to this drive by the party leadership, Kucinich folded up his campaign, failing to wage even a struggle against the pro-war plank in the Democratic platform. Instead, he called for unity behind Kerry. “The next critical step we must take is to help elect John Kerry as the next president of the United States,” Kucinich told reporters. “The word is unity. That is the operative word.” Given the opportunity to speak at the Democratic national convention, Kucinich called on delegates and voters to “blaze a new path with John Kerry and John Edwards.”

Thus, Kucinich’s “antiwar” candidacy provided a political cover for the right-wing policies of the Democratic leadership and helped contain the mass opposition to the war within the confines this big business party. Although he was exposed as an apologist for the selection of a pro-war Democratic candidate during the last presidential election, this is not stopping Kucinich from offering to play the same role once again.



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