

An exchange on the presidential campaign of Dennis Kucinich

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The World Socialist Web Site received several letters on the December 15 article, “ ‘Antiwar’ candidate boosts illusions in a pro-war party: Kucinich runs again for Democratic presidential nomination”. Below we post three letters expressing disagreement with the political assessment made in the article, and a reply by its author, Jerry White.

Shame on you! In pushing forward with blinders on, you, as many WSWS writers have done in the past, have chosen to script a brutally critical analysis that only alienates those who share many of the same views that you do. Surely the Congressman is playing for the wrong team, and the Socialist stance is unquestionably the best alternative. But in saying so, you only prove that you have a firm grasp of the obvious. Do you honestly believe that Kucinich is some sort of a capitalist tool? Do you not remember that he held back his support for the heavily flawed and sickeningly bourgeois Kerry campaign until the very last minute? This showed those of us who understand the difficulty in affecting the actions of the power elite in this country that he was a courageous camper amongst an army of lame and self-interested Democrats.

Please, in the future, try to consider that there are many who, though they may be lost in the antidemocratic two-party system of the present, may one day be your comrades in a socialist economic democracy.

RV

Athens, Georgia

Would not discrediting the Democrats be a good thing if it pushed the people toward a socialist democracy? Would not Kucinich be in a superior position for the election of a leftist president? Would that not be good for the World Socialist movement? We could then move toward universal health care and people, not profit-oriented pharmaceuticals, strengthening unions, improving the equity of education, merit teaching, rising minimum wages, increased taxes on corporate and securities incomes, a balanced budget, transparency in business and government, and so on and on.

PB

Groton, New York

Dear Jerry,

You write, “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 of a mass independent political movement in opposition to the two capitalist parties, i.e., a socialist alternative.... 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.”

So, you advise that Kucinich at bottom fears socialism and is deliberately trying to undercut it by pretending to be “antiwar” even while supporting the warmonger Kerry, offers a reprise performance this year, and does so as a conscious lackey of his imperialist masters.

I advise that Kucinich doesn’t worry a whit about socialism, that the rulers worry even less about it even while wishing to keep the illusions in place, and that Kucinich is sincerely trying to rouse both the people and

the Democratic leadership to do the right (anti-imperialist) thing despite this being an impossible task; that when push comes to shove, Kucinich will call for party unity and thus objectively support the lesser of the two evils—the one likely to oppress the American people less—because he correctly assesses that the revolutionary prospects for which you hold out such great hope have little or no hope of ever succeeding, and certainly none in the foreseeable future.

It’s one thing to have another perspective, but quite another to impugn the sincerity, character and motives of the person you critique solely because he charts a pragmatic course of which you strongly disapprove. Your effectiveness is diminished by this tack.

Sincerely,

MG

Los Angeles, California

Jerry White replies:

The letters posted above provide an opportunity to further clarify the nature of the politics of the Democratic congressman from Ohio and the basis upon which the WSWS opposes those like Kucinich who claim the war in Iraq can be stopped by seeking to influence the Democratic Party and pushing it to the left.

Before replying to the specific disagreements, I would like to make an observation. The letters suffer from a superficial approach, which fails to draw lessons from the experiences of the past. This is a thoroughly inadequate method to use in judging the character of political parties and figures. While one letter writer criticizes the WSWS for making a “brutally critical analysis” of Kucinich, this is precisely what is required. Without a scientific and historical approach, one is left with what amounts to wishful thinking and self-delusion, and no objective means to judge the viability of Kucinich’s claims that his party can be pressured and convinced, as one letter writer puts it, to “do the right (anti-imperialist) thing.”

Nowhere in these letters is there an objective assessment of the Democratic Party. Nothing is said of the class character of this party—that it is a capitalist party that defends the interests of American big business throughout the world and directed such imperialist wars as the ones in Korea and Vietnam. Nor is there any effort to seek out the root causes for the shift to the right of the Democrats and the American political establishment as a whole over the last three decades, a period that has witnessed the repudiation of the policies of social reformism by both parties. Finally, the letter writers fail to review the most recent record of the Democrats in relation to the Iraq war or the role played by Kucinich himself.

What was the experience of those opposed to the war who supported Kucinich in 2004? He elicited support on the grounds that he was strongly opposed to the war, and then turned around at the Democratic Convention and in the most cowardly and opportunist manner urged his delegates to vote for Kerry as the Democratic candidate, despite Kerry’s grotesque appeal to patriotism and militarism and his repudiation of the broad antiwar sentiment among Democratic voters at the convention. While the

letter writers suggest it is illegitimate to criticize Kucinich, the reality is he played an important role in suppressing antiwar opposition and allowing Bush to continue the war. And, I might add, he did so in a very deliberate and conscious fashion.

Kucinich provides no accounting of the role he played in 2004 and won't say how he will do anything different this time around. However, working people and young people must draw lessons from this experience. As the saying goes, those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it

Kucinich insisted and continues to insist that the struggle against the war must be confined within the limits of the Democratic Party. But there is nothing in the record of the Democrats since the beginning of the war that suggests they are anything but willing accomplices in this criminal assault on the Iraqi people. During the 2002 mid-term elections, just months before the invasion, the Democrats restricted their campaign to domestic issues and sought to censor any debate on the impending war—even though the Bush administration was seeking a vote on a resolution to authorize military action, which passed the House and Senate only days before the election. Defying widespread antiwar opposition—which would express itself in the US and internationally in the worldwide wave of antiwar demonstrations in February 2003—many leading Democrats echoed the lies about supposed WMDs that were utilized to launch the war.

In 2004, the Democrats again sought to prevent the election from becoming a referendum on the ongoing war. In the face of growing opposition to the war—expressed in one form through the support for Vermont Governor Howard Dean's campaign—the Democrats once again suppressed antiwar sentiment within their own ranks by ditching Dean and endorsing the pro-war candidate Kerry. Kucinich, along with Al Sharpton and Dean himself, were critical in lining up the antiwar opposition behind Kerry and dissipating it once again.

Despite the Democrats' best efforts to keep any serious debate on the war out of the most recent elections, the mass opposition burst through in a repudiation of Bush and the war at the polls. In the immediate aftermath, the Democrats sought to channel opposition behind the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, which called for a tactical shift in military and diplomatic policy to prevent an out-and-out defeat of the US in Iraq.

President Bush has repudiated any suggestion of troop withdrawals and plans to bring in more US troops to escalate the war against the Iraqi people. Bush is determined to defy the mass opposition to the war because he knows he will face no serious opposition from the Democratic Party, which has been complicit in this crime since the run-up to the invasion.

If Kucinich were serious about opposing the war, he would quit the Democratic Party. But this he won't do. Instead, he has made it clear that his campaign is aimed at "saving" the Democratic Party and the American political system. Noting that the war had sharply eroded trust in the two-party system, Kucinich said he was running to fulfill a "sacred responsibility" to "protect people's faith in not just our party, but in the political process itself."

There was still time, he added, to "rescue the people's confidence in the Democratic Party and their trust in government."

His decision to seek the Democratic presidential nomination once more is bound up with serious concerns within the party's leadership that its commitment to continue the war is placing it on a collision course with tens of millions of Americans who voted to end it. At least some of the more thoughtful politicians realize that if the American people cannot stop the war through an election, they will seek other means to do so, including looking for an alternative outside of the two-party system.

As I noted in my article, "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."

Kucinich is not the first, nor will he be the last, to claim that the Democratic Party is the people's party. As one of the oldest capitalist parties in the world, the Democrats have long claimed that they could reconcile the interests of working people with the profit system. In periods of crisis, such as the mass industrial upheavals of the Depression Years, and again during the antiwar, civil rights and labor upheavals of the 1960s, the Democratic Party took the lead in enacting liberal reforms in order to save American capitalism from social revolution. These limited concessions to the working class were possible because of America's unchallenged economic supremacy.

Over the last three decades, however, the US has suffered an historic decline in its world economic position, and the policy of class compromise and social reform has been jettisoned in favor of an unrelenting attack on the jobs and living standards of working people, the slashing of social programs and massive tax cuts for the rich. This has gone hand in hand with a growth of militarism and a recurring recourse to war as an instrument of US foreign policy.

There is a bipartisan consensus to use US military might to offset the decline of America's global economic position and forestall the emergence of powerful economic competitors, such as China. The Democrats, as much as the Republicans, are committed to the use of massive violence to seize control of the oil resources of the Middle East and are determined to prevent a Vietnam-style defeat in Iraq.

In his letter to the WSWS, RV asks, "Do you honestly believe that Kucinich is some sort of a capitalist tool?" In a similar vein, MG suggests it is absurd to believe that Kucinich is functioning as a "conscious lackey of his imperialist masters."

Our answer is: Yes. That is precisely what he is, and his record proves it.

RV concludes, "Please, in the future, try to consider that there are many who, though they may be lost in the antidemocratic two-party system of the present, may one day be your comrades in a socialist economic democracy."

We appreciate this sentiment and do not equate Kucinich—who is a conscious bourgeois politician—with those who mistakenly support him or may vote for him in the future. Many people who presently support the Democrats will be pushed by events towards a socialist alternative. It is precisely for this reason that we must ruthlessly fight to dispel illusions in the Democrats and expose those like Kucinich who try to provide it with a left cover in order to keep working people and youth trapped in the "antidemocratic two-party system."

MG from Los Angeles acknowledges that the effort to turn the Democrats into an anti-imperialist party is "an impossible task." Nevertheless, he supports Kucinich because the Democrats are the "lesser of the two evils—the one [party] likely to oppress the American people less." This is the best one can do, MG suggests, because the "revolutionary prospects...have little or no hope of ever succeeding, and certainly none in the foreseeable future."

History has shown that the "lesser of two evils" argument is a political formula for the continued domination of the working class by the political parties of big business. Far from opposing the right-wing policies of Bush and the Republicans, the Democrats have been and will continue to be willing accomplices. The mass opposition to the war and the reactionary agenda of the Bush administration can find genuine expression only if working people reject the "lesser of two evils" canard, break with the Democratic Party and build a socialist alternative.

The prospects for the revolutionary transformation of society are far more realistic than relying on the Democratic Party to end the war and

oppose the right-wing agenda of Bush and the Republicans. While the latter project bases itself on naïve or willful blindness, a revolutionary perspective bases itself on a scientific and historical perspective. This includes an objective assessment of the consequences of the crisis of American and world capitalism and the breakdown of democratic norms under the weight of unprecedented social inequality.

MG suggests that the American ruling elite and its political representatives are not worried about the danger of socialism, presumably because those who consciously fight for a socialist perspective remain a small minority in the US. Yet, history has demonstrated more than once that war—and in particular a military and political debacle, such as we are now seeing in Iraq—can shake the foundations of an apparently impregnable political and economic order and open the way for the revolutionary intervention of the masses.

The American people voted overwhelmingly to end the war, but this has done nothing to stop the president and his Democratic accomplices from escalating it. At the same time, America's corporate and financial elites—who alone stood to benefit from this imperialist war—are continuing to enrich themselves with multimillion-dollar payoffs, while workers face an unrelenting assault on their jobs and living standards. What recourse then do the masses of working people have except a struggle outside of the existing political and economic setup? The prospects for such an upheaval were recently acknowledged by *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, who wrote, "There's a reason why the power elite get bent out of shape at the merest mention of a class conflict in the US. The fear is that the cringing majority that has taken it on the chin for so long will wise up and begin to fight back."

What is our prognosis? We anticipate great social struggles in the US and internationally against militarism, the effort to recolonize whole portions of the globe and the enormous attack on the social, economic and democratic rights of the working class, which is being forced to pay for this and future military adventures. It is the task of the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party to arm these coming struggles with a socialist perspective and fight for the political independence of the working class against all those, including such figures as Kucinich, who want to subordinate the needs of workers and young people to the dictates of the profit system.

Large numbers of working people and students are beginning to draw political lessons about the bankruptcy of the Democratic Party and its hollow promises. They are moving to the left and are opening up to a socialist alternative to the two corporate controlled parties. Kucinich comes forward today precisely to evoke the mistaken and misguided illusions in the Democratic Party that the letter writers express. The task of the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party is not to adapt to the confusion generated by bourgeois politicians and the media but to tell the truth. The only means of ending war and social reaction is by breaking with the Democratic Party and capitalist politics as a whole and building a mass socialist movement of the working class to put an end to the economic and political system that produces these evils.

Fraternally yours,

Jerry White



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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