

Democrats' "Out of Iraq" caucus puts on a show for its radical friends

Tom Carter in Washington DC
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A January 29 event in Washington sponsored by the "Out of Iraq" congressional caucus exemplified the political orientation of the left-liberal, Stalinist and middle-class radical forces that organized the January 27 antiwar protest.

The event, advertised as a book fair and discussion, was addressed by Maxine Waters and Lynn Woolsey, both Democratic representatives from California. The two congresswomen were among a number of Democrats who addressed the January 27 march, which was sponsored by the United for Peace and Justice coalition.

The January 29 event was held for the benefit of march organizers and participants who had remained in Washington to lobby congressmen and senators. The two congresswomen presided over a panel discussion of academics, journalists and veterans who had published books on the Iraq war.

The panel reflected the political tendencies involved in United for Peace and Justice. It included Christian Parenti, a correspondent for the *Nation* magazine, and Anthony Arnone, a member of the International Socialist Organization who has written articles for the *Nation*, the *International Socialist Review*, *Socialist Worker*, *Red Pepper*, and other radical publications.

It is not a revelation that Waters and Woolsey are political impostors, who have made their careers by adapting themselves to the policies of the American ruling elite while conning their constituents with demagoguery and empty promises. Nor are the opportunist politics of the forces that dominate United for Peace and Justice a new discovery.

Nevertheless, this reporter was struck by the unqualified and unrestrained character of the support—even adulation—exhibited for these Democratic Party fakers by those in the audience.

Like groupies at a rock concert, many of the 50 or 60 attendees lined up to be photographed standing next to Maxine Waters, grateful for the chance to bask in her reflected glory. In the course of the proceedings, the audience cheered at every left-sounding declaration the congresswomen made—on several occasions interrupting their remarks with standing ovations.

Taken as a whole, the event illustrated some hallmarks of the radical protest milieu: an appalling superficiality and willful blindness in political approach and analysis, an organic gravitation to the Democratic Party, and a longing for political

respectability.

The political perspective that dominated the event was clear from the outset. In her opening remarks, Woolsey noted that prior to last November, when the Democrats were in the minority in both houses of Congress, they would have been obliged to hold such a meeting in the basement of one of the congressional office buildings. She gestured at the large, ornately-upholstered hearing room usually used by the House Ways and Means Committee to dramatize the Democrats' change in fortunes. The entire audience erupted in applause.

Notwithstanding the exultation of United for Peace and Justice, the *Nation* and associated groups over the Democrats' newfound congressional supremacy, the benefit to be derived by the broad mass of working people from the fact that Waters and Woolsey are now in the majority and can host meetings in more prestigious environs can be precisely estimated. In round figures, it is zero.

Who are Maxine Waters and Lynn Woolsey, and what do they represent politically? They and the rest of their Out of Iraq caucus are not in principle opposed to American imperialism or the global aims and interests of the US financial elite. They seek to keep opposition to the war on the most narrow and superficial level and conceal the root causes of the war in the capitalist system itself—a system which they defend.

Thus they are obliged to combine sometimes militant-sounding denunciations of the war with protestations of patriotism and praise for "our men and women in uniform." They accept uncritically the political-propaganda framework concocted by the Bush administration to justify the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the future wars being planned by US strategists—the so-called "war on terror." They can be heard denouncing the Iraq war as a diversion that has weakened the "war on terror," and suggesting that more troops, money and blood need to be devoted to Afghanistan or other countries deemed obstacles to US interests.

They are driven infinitely more by the failure of the US colonial exercise in Iraq than by its imperialist and lawless essence. That is why all of their declarations and actions assume such a two-faced and cynical character.

It should be recalled that Woolsey voted for the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, which declared that the policy of the

United States in Iraq was regime-change. This act, passed unanimously in the Senate and overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives during the Clinton presidency, set the stage for the military invasion carried out under Bush. Having voted for a policy that implicitly set the course for military aggression, Woolsey shares political responsibility for the catastrophic consequences.

Waters, Woolsey and a half-dozen other congressmen founded the Out of Iraq caucus in June of 2005, i.e., after more than two years of bloody occupation and after mass antiwar sentiment within the US and around the world had reached the point where it could not be safely ignored.

From the beginning, the founders of the Out of Iraq caucus took great pains to provide alibis for the failure of the Democrats to oppose the war, writing in their mission statement that “in the shadow of events on September 11, many felt unable or unwilling to speak out in opposition to the war in Iraq.”

On January 17 of this year, Waters and Woolsey introduced House Resolution 508, a bill with virtually no chance of passing that calls for the withdrawal of US forces within a six-month period. At the January 29 book fair and discussion, as well as at the protest two days earlier, both congresswomen touted this bill as a rallying point for opposition to the war.

The bill itself begins with the obligatory tribute to the troops: “The brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces continue to serve with distinction in Iraq and have earned the respect and gratitude of the American people.”

It goes on to declare that the government of Iraq has been elected “democratically” and calls for the defense of that government during its “transition to democratic rule.” The authors of the bill, in other words, promote the grotesque fiction that the government in Iraq, established at the point of American bayonets, is legitimate and democratic.

In defending this puppet regime the bill effectively legitimizes the colonialist war that created it.

The bill proposes the deployment of an undefined “international stabilization force” in Iraq as a replacement for US forces. This is a euphemism for a new imperialist force, whether under the auspices of the United Nations or NATO, to maintain the subjugation of the Iraqi people.

At the January 29 event, Waters on a number of occasions referred to herself as a “patriot” and reiterated her “support for the troops.” At the conclusion of the discussion, she asked all veterans to stand and receive a round of applause.

The discussion itself was carefully circumscribed. Political criticism was directed exclusively against members of the Bush administration and the Republican Party, and criticism of the war was largely restricted to its “mismanagement.”

Waters at one point asked members of the panel for their suggestions for a “credible exit strategy” that could be embraced by other members of the Democratic Party. To a principled opponent of the war, the “exit strategy” is simple

and straightforward: withdraw all troops immediately and unconditionally. “Credible exit strategy” is a code phrase bandied about in Washington and by the media that implies a plan to salvage US imperialism’s basic interests in Iraq and avoid a catastrophic defeat.

At another point Waters stood reality on its head, asking the panel how the American people could be convinced to oppose the war: “How do we help the American people to understand, to have the courage?” she asked.

As Waters well knows, the American people are already overwhelmingly opposed to the war, which is why they voted to end Republican control of Congress last November. Her suggestion that the war continues because the people lack courage is a crude attempt to project the cowardice and complicity of herself and her party onto the population.

The mutual love fest between the protest organizers and the left-talking Democrats highlighted some important facts of American political life. The Bush administration would not be able to carry out its policies of war and attacks on democratic rights without the compliance of the Democratic Party.

But for the Democrats to serve this function, they require a “left” face, whose role is to keep up the fiction that the Democratic Party is a “party of the people” that, despite all of its sins, can be pressured to pursue policies of peace and social justice. This is where Waters, Woolsey and their ilk come in.

This deception could never be effective without a loyal corps of professional protesters, political opportunists, middle-class radicals, Stalinists, etc., whose job is to lend these con artists credibility so as to keep the working class chained to American capitalism’s two-party duopoly of social reaction and war.



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