

The Nation magazine offers an alibi for Democrats' support of Iraq war

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Thursday's votes in the US Senate and House of Representatives in favor of a bill providing another \$100 billion in war-funding have a far-reaching and unmistakable significance that will find an inevitable reflection in the political consciousness of broad masses of the American people.

Having won the leadership of both houses of Congress in the 2006 congressional elections thanks to a groundswell of antiwar sentiment, the Democratic Party leadership has now provided all the money and more that President Bush requested for the continuation and escalation of a criminal war, and it has done so under terms dictated by the White House.

What have the Democrats bought with their "emergency" spending bill? Bush answered this question at a press conference in the White House Rose Garden Thursday, where he warned, "We're going to expect heavy fighting in the weeks and months. We can expect more American and Iraqi casualties." He went on to predict a "bloody" August.

With at least 90 US troops killed already in the month of May, and thousands of Iraqi fatalities, what is being prepared is an unprecedented wave of mass killing aimed at crushing resistance to the US occupation and bludgeoning the Iraqi people into submission.

The war crimes that are being prepared in plain sight are opposed by the vast majority of the American people. Yet, with nearly 70 percent of the population against the war in Iraq, this mass antiwar sentiment can find no real expression in the decisions and actions of the US government. The Democratic Party, no less than Bush and the Republicans, is responsible for this political disenfranchisement of tens of millions of Americans in the interests of pursuing a neo-colonial war.

In the six months since the November elections, the Democrats have sought to placate and deceive the voters who handed them the reins of power in the House and Senate by posturing as opponents of the war, while at the same time pledging to "support the troops" by funding that war and continuing to support the geo-strategic goals that underlay the March 2003 invasion in the first place.

On Thursday, this political balancing act fell apart in a cowardly and cynical capitulation to the White House. The inevitable result of this cave-in is massive anger among those who voted for the Democrats last November and a growing sense that none of the institutions or political parties of the ruling establishment reflect the democratic will of the people.

Countering such sentiments and attempting to resuscitate illusions in the Democrats is the specific task of a layer of the American "left" that is thoroughly integrated into the Democratic Party. Its political conceptions and aims—shared by a variety of protest groups, "left"

think tanks and a smattering of elected officials—are expressed most clearly by the weekly *Nation* magazine.

It would appear that the current issue of the *Nation*, dated June 11, went to press after the Democratic leadership in Congress had formalized its abject surrender to the White House—accepting a war-funding measure without even the pretense of a timetable for withdrawing US troops from Iraq—but before the actual votes in the House and Senate to approve the legislation.

This awkward timing leads to some inevitable pratfalls by the *Nation's* editors in a lead editorial entitled "Iraq Timeline Runs Out."

The thrust of this statement is an argument that "disunity" and "defections" by a relative handful of right-wing Democrats have undermined the valiant efforts of the party's leadership in the House and Senate to legislate a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

Thus, the magazine's readers are told, the likes of Michigan Democratic Senator Carl Levin, the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and Congressman Steny Hoyer, the Democrats' House majority leader, have "prevented House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate majority leader Harry Reid from forcing a timeline on the Administration."

"The Democratic majority in Congress is so razor-thin that in late May it finally gave up the attempt to pass a funding bill establishing a timeline for withdrawal," the editorial explains.

The magazine's editors write as if they were part of a public relations firm hired to massage the images of Pelosi and Reid.

"At least Pelosi and Reid are voting right," the editorial declares. It cites the House speaker's and Senate majority leader's votes on a pair of resolutions that were doomed to defeat from the outset, both calling for a cut in funding for "combat troops" in Iraq.

Here, the timing of the *Nation's* editorial served to underscore the fraudulence of its entire thesis. The supposedly principled opponent of war Harry Reid joined 37 other Democrats in the Senate in voting for the war-funding bill. Only 10 Democrats voted against.

As for Pelosi, while personally voting against the measure in the House, she carefully packaged the legislation to ensure its passage by a nearly unanimous Republican minority and 86 Democrats. This was accomplished by means of an adroit parliamentary maneuver, which split a domestic funding portion of the legislation—opposed by some Republicans—from its war spending core, thus assuring that the latter received a solid majority. More importantly, 216 Democrats voted in favor of this procedure—with only seven voting "no"—making the approval of the war spending inevitable.

At a Friday press conference, Pelosi termed the legislation she had voted against "a step in the right direction" and defended her shepherding of the bill through Congress with the increasingly

threadbare claim that money appropriated to continue the slaughter in Iraq is designed to “support the troops.”

“As of today, President Bush no longer has a blank check for a war without end in Iraq,” Pelosi declared in her prepared statement issued Friday. Indeed, the check is not blank. It has hers and the Democratic Party’s names on it.

Treating the Democratic leadership’s hollow pledge to “keep fighting” as good coin, the *Nation* writes, “Pelosi and Reid are right when they say this is not the end of the fight over money for Iraq.” The only problem, it suggests, is that “there are still prominent Democrats who don’t get it”—Levin, Hoyer and Co.—and they “are slowing movement toward unity in support of withdrawal.”

The “unacceptable votes” cast by these supposedly rogue Democrats “should raise the ire of antiwar activists and the American people,” the *Nation* affirms, and those who cast them should be “held accountable for extending the war.”

The editorial concludes, “Americans must make it clear that when the next chance comes to use the power of the purse, our representatives should follow the will of the people and call a halt to Bush’s disastrous war.”

Nothing could more clearly sum up the *Nation*’s political function. It seeks to delude its readers into thinking that the ongoing complicity of the Democratic Party in the launching and continuation of the war in Iraq is a matter of a “razor thin” majority in Congress and the wayward votes of a few political miscreants. Thus, the perspective it advances is that these few politicians—mere warts on an otherwise healthy political body—should be shamed, and the public should wait for the Democrats to do better next time.

Everything here is reduced to the small change of party politics and petty maneuvers in the halls of Congress. It leaves unanswered the big and obvious questions of why the Democrats are incapable of mounting a genuine opposition to the war and why the party’s congressional leadership has no intention of doing either of the two things that could force its end—blocking all funds for the Iraq occupation or impeaching Bush for the war crimes and anti-democratic abuses that have been carried out under his administration.

The explanation is to be found not in the “razor thin” majority that the Democrats have in Congress—that never stopped the Republican Party from forcing through its right-wing agenda when it held the leadership—but in the class nature of the Democratic Party and the character of the war itself.

The Democratic Party—no less than the Republicans—is controlled by and defends the interests of a financial elite. That is the basic reason why it supported and continues to support a war that was launched to further the global interests of the US banks and corporations by establishing American hegemony over the strategic oil supplies of the Middle East.

Whatever the party’s tactical differences with the Bush administration, no piece of legislation that has been brought to a vote or backed by any section of the Democratic leadership over the past several months has called for a complete withdrawal of all US troops from Iraq. Every one of the Democrats’ measures has included language that clearly envisions the maintenance of an occupation force numbering at least in the tens of thousands for the foreseeable future, and therefore a continuation of the bloodbath. On this, the *Nation*’s editors are notably silent.

Yet the Democrats posture as a “people’s” party, one that supposedly defends the interests of average working people against the predations of big business. As social polarization has grown ever

wider in the US, however, this pretense has grown increasingly stale. At home, the Democrats are a party of fiscal austerity, while its leading candidates are virtually all multi-millionaires. Abroad, they are a party of militarism, committed to the buildup and use of military force to further the profit interests of US big business.

Under conditions in which many millions of American working people have drawn their own political conclusions and are profoundly alienated from and hostile to the Democrats and the entire two-party system, the *Nation*, as well as protest organizations such as moveon.org and United for Peace and Justice, desperately seek to give the Democrats a “left” face, attempting to revive illusions that the Democratic Party can be compelled by mass pressure to pursue a policy of social justice and peace.

No doubt there is among these forces an element of self-delusion, as well as the deliberate deluding of others. In either case, definite social interests are expressed.

The transfer of congressional leadership to the Democrats may have failed to stop the war or produce any significant changes for the masses of working people in America, but it has yielded definite benefits for the privileged layer of upper-middle-class “left” liberals for whom the *Nation* speaks. Many of them have filled coveted staff positions on Capitol Hill or seen the fortunes of the liberal think tanks with which they are associated rise. The *Nation*’s editor, Katrina vanden Heuvel, has with increasing frequency been admitted to the ranks of pundits appearing on television talk shows.

This left wing of the US political establishment is being promoted for definite political purposes. America’s ruling elite fears the eruption of mass movements of social protest and, above all, the emergence of a genuinely independent political movement of the working class in opposition to the two-party system and the profit interests it defends.

The job of these “left” PR agents for the Democratic Party is to politically suffocate any such movement and to contain social protest, diverting it back into the harmless confines of the Democratic Party.

This political task, however, is growing increasingly difficult. The war-funding vote, notwithstanding the *Nation*’s advice to wait for the Democrats’ “next chance” to vote against the war, marks a definite turning point in American political life, and one from which the Democratic Party’s credibility may never recover.



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