

Detroit town hall meeting on impeachment provides political cover for the Democratic Party

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5 June 2007

A coalition of protest groups in concert with local Democratic officials held a town hall meeting calling for the impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney at a Detroit church on May 29. The panel of speakers, which included a local Democratic Party politician, sought to focus attention exclusively on the crimes of the Bush administration and promote illusions in the Democratic Party.

The event came less than one week after the Democrats in both houses of Congress caved in on their demands for withdrawal timetables and voted to authorize more than \$100 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Detroit meeting, one in series being held around the country, was sponsored by the National Lawyers Guild, the Gray Panthers, Latinos Unidos of Michigan, the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, Democrats.com, AfterDowningStreet.org, the Progressive Democrats of America, World Can't Wait, the Green Party, and others.

The meeting made clear that these various protest organizations, which work within and alongside the Democratic Party, are using the impeachment demand to whitewash the role of the Democratic Party in the war and the reactionary policies of the Bush administration, and keep growing popular opposition within the confines of the two-party system.

In the course of the meeting, which was attended by around 200 people, the panelists placed the responsibility for war crimes and the erosion of democratic rights exclusively at the feet of the Republicans, the Bush administration and the media, while the Democrats were falsely portrayed as opponents of the war and defenders of democratic rights.

On the panel from Detroit were Bill Goodman, a National Lawyers Guild attorney and former legal director for the Center for Constitutional Rights; JoAnn Watson, a Democratic Detroit City Council member; Maureen Taylor, state chair of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization; and Jack Lessenberry, a *Detroit Metro Times* editorialist and public radio host.

Also among the panelists were Ann Wright, a former member of the State Department who resigned in protest the day before the invasion of Iraq, and Ray McGovern, a former CIA analyst who prepared daily briefs for Presidents Ronald Reagan and the

senior George Bush.

Goodman and Wright opened the meeting by outlining the charges for impeachment and the crimes of the Bush administration, which included unlawful wire-tapping, waging an illegal war in Iraq, the indefinite detention and torture of prisoners at Guantánamo, and the neglect of victims of Hurricane Katrina. McGovern focused on the Bush administration's lies about weapons of mass destruction and the media's role in promoting the war.

They failed to mention the role of the Democrats, who are complicit in the launching and prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who have provided the necessary votes in Congress to establish, via legislation such as the Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act, the legal framework for the police state measures employed by the Bush administration.

In response to a question about the viability of impeachment within the two-party system, Goodman told the audience, "There is still hope for impeachment from the Democratic Party, and we have to fight for that." At another point in the discussion, Goodman encouraged voters to give the Democrats more time. "Every day is bringing a new revelation, a new scandal," he said. Later, he declared, "We may get the two thirds in the Senate."

Wright acknowledged that the Democrats had just caved in on funding for the war, but remained undeterred, saying, "In September we need to go after them." She urged the audience to occupy the halls of Congress in September, when the president must again request funding, to pressure the Democrats not to fund the war.

Those who are organizing this impeachment campaign are dishonestly seeking to hide from view an inconvenient political reality: the Democratic Party leadership is officially and emphatically opposed to impeachment. Democratic Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi has repeatedly told reporters that impeachment is "off the table," as has the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, John Conyers of Detroit, who would be responsible for chairing any hearings on impeachment.

Conyers was billed as a panelist at the May 29 meeting, and

even made an appearance early in the meeting, but did not participate in the discussion or take questions. Conyers spoke at a separate town hall meeting he called in Detroit that same evening to discuss high gas prices.

Conyers's wife Monica Conyers co-sponsored a resolution passed May 16 by the all-Democratic Detroit City Council calling on the House of Representatives to impeach Bush and Cheney.

The town hall meeting panelists touted articles of impeachment introduced in April by Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich of Ohio. As with all of Kucinich's antiwar gestures, this initiative is designed to provide a political fig leaf for the Democratic Party by maintaining the pretense that there is a serious antiwar faction within the party leadership.

The panelists at the meeting, while encouraging those in favor of impeachment to support a party that opposes any such action, were completely at a loss to explain *why* that party is so wholeheartedly opposed to impeachment.

The Democrats' unwillingness to mount a genuine challenge to the Bush administration, whether through impeachment or a cut-off of war funds, is bound up with the party's fundamental class character. The Democratic Party is a party of big business, committed to the defense of the basic interests of American capitalism. It is an imperialist party, which supports, whatever its tactical differences with Bush and the Republicans, the global economic and geo-strategic aims that underlie the invasion and occupation of Iraq—first and foremost, the establishment of US control over the vast oil resources of Iraq and, more broadly, the Middle East and Central Asia.

There is no shortage of illegalities for which Bush and Cheney could be impeached—crimes that go far beyond those of Richard Nixon, who was forced to resign under threat of impeachment in 1974.

However, the Democrats share with the Republicans and the American ruling elite as a whole the conviction that the stakes for US imperialism in Iraq are too high to countenance a rapid withdrawal of American forces under conditions in which such a move would be seen all over the world—and within the US itself—as a historic defeat for the United States. All of their “antiwar” posturing, inevitably couched in terms of “supporting the troops” and effecting a “responsible” and “successful” outcome in Iraq, has a twofold purpose: to placate and dissipate mass antiwar sentiment within the US and better direct US military violence and diplomacy so as to avoid a Vietnam-style debacle.

In light of US imperialism's weakened international position and the highly volatile state of social relations within the US, the Democratic Party fears that any serious challenge to the war and the Bush administration could trigger both international and domestic consequences of far-reaching and potentially disastrous—from the standpoint of the US ruling elite—consequences.

Thirty years after the resignation of Nixon, the rejection of

impeachment by the Democrats, the media and the political establishment as a whole is a measure of the vast decay of American democracy. It demonstrates that there is no section of the American ruling elite that retains a serious commitment to the defense of constitutional processes and democratic rights.

Moreover, the attempt to corral popular opposition to the war and the Bush administration behind a campaign for impeachment is itself a political deceit and diversion. The impeachment of Bush and Cheney, even were it to occur, would not fundamentally change the direction of US policy, either abroad or at home.

The pretense of the organizers of the Detroit meeting that removing Bush and Cheney would end the war in Iraq and prevent new aggressive wars is belied by the repeated statements and actions of the Democrats themselves. The entire party leadership supported the record Pentagon spending bill, which includes a major increase in the size of the Army, Marines and Special Forces. Every leading Democratic presidential candidate has argued that Bush's conduct of the Iraq war is weakening America's ability to wage war in other countries, such as Afghanistan and Iran.

What would be the practical consequences of impeachment? If Bush were impeached and removed, Cheney would assume the presidency. If both Bush and Cheney were removed, the next in line would be House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is opposed to any rapid withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, supports the occupation of Afghanistan, and supports the imperialist interests and aims that underlie both wars.

The Iraq war, and imperialist war in general, does not arise from the personal attributes of one or another individual. The fact that the entire US political and media establishment supported the Bush administration's war drive against Iraq—promoting the administration's obvious lies about weapons of mass destruction and Iraq-Al Qaeda ties—testifies to the existence of deeper causes.

Imperialist war arises from the crisis and contradictions of the capitalist system itself, which drive the ruling elites of different nation states to engage in a struggle for control of the world's strategic resources, sources of labor power, and markets.

A serious struggle to end the war, defend democratic rights and halt the destruction of working class living standards can be mounted only on the basis of a fight against the Democratic Party, the two-party system, and the US corporate oligarchy whose interests these parties defend. It requires the building of an independent political movement of working people based on socialist and internationalist policies.



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