

Letters and a reply on the Kucinich presidential campaign

19 June 2007

Many readers have written to the World Socialist Web Site in response to the June 5 article on the Democratic presidential debate in New Hampshire, which sharply criticized the antiwar posturing of Congressman Dennis Kucinich. (See “Democrats pose as Iraq war opponents in New Hampshire debate”). Below we publish three letters and a reply by Patrick Martin of the WSWS editorial board.

Kucinich is for real. If Kucinich were elected, you could hold him to his campaign promises. What is the purpose of minimalizing the only candidate willing to create peace? By doing this, you set us up for permanent war. The alternative to Kucinich is more extreme capitalism and endless war. We are finally at a point where we can make a difference and you want to take it away. Why shoot true socialists in the foot and discourage people from supporting a candidate who could and would fight capitalistic greed?

AH

Once again, like a boy hitting the broad side of a barn with a pebble, the WSWS criticizes the Democratic lot. But of all of them, it is, *not* ironically, Congressman Dennis Kucinich of whom you are most afraid. After all, he is the greatest threat to the “real left” policies you preach and the political future of the SEP and others. I beg of you, step back and take a good look at yourselves. In repeatedly criticizing this man are you not playing the same political games of which you accuse (and rightfully so) the Democrats? Don’t you wish to be an example of a new political ideal that, while criticizing others, may also be able to salute them for their support of ideas and policies which you both share?

Look, as I’ve said before, it’s easy to see that Kucinich is stuck in, and working for, a rotten bunch. However, even the history of American Socialists is filled with examples of those who have found themselves working within a rotten system. These situations stand as the reasons for three objectives: (1) The new system, (2) Continuous criticism, and (3) a *cooperative* effort that, without casting off those of us who vary slightly in their beliefs of methods, allows for us all to work *collectively* towards a solution.

RV

Athens, Georgia

I wish that you could be one of the reporters, consultants, along with James Carville and Arianna Huffington, commenting on the debates on CNN.

I was disappointed that Congressman Kucinich did not use the “I” for Impeachment word in Sunday’s debates.

Have you had an opportunity to review the one hour speech that Congressman Kucinich gave on the House floor about the 33-page Hydrocarbon legislation that the Iraqi Parliament is expected to approve under US gunfire as a possible provision for a US drawdown of troops. Congressman Kucinich went on to explain for an hour on the House Floor that the United States is robbing the oil from the Iraqis and the “war on terror” in Iraq multinational corporations to be able to dismantle the system of state-owned oil in Iraq.

And we don’t know what the American government is doing under the

table in Venezuela?

My second comment is, I love your website and articles, writing and thought process.

How do we make your ideas more relevant so that those of us who support ending the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and impeachment of the Bush regime and Universal Healthcare can have more leverage and discussion to educate the American public in the mainstream media?

LZ

Patrick Martin replies:

All three readers, two of them highly supportive of Kucinich, one of them mixing praise and criticism, fail to address the main issue: the function of Kucinich’s presidential campaign in providing a left cover for the Democratic Party.

It is not a matter of judging Kucinich as an isolated individual and simply examining his stated views on this or that issue. For all his radical phrase-mongering, Kucinich is a national figure in the Democratic Party, one of the two main political instruments through which the corporate oligarchy rules the United States.

Kucinich is not a political naïf, but an experienced Democratic Party politician with a record going back nearly four decades, including years on the Cleveland, Ohio city council, as mayor of Cleveland, as an Ohio state legislator, as a six-term congressman and two-time presidential candidate.

None of the three letter-writers makes any reference to Kucinich’s 2004 presidential campaign. But we are certainly entitled to judge the credibility of his posture as an antiwar standard-bearer in 2008 based on the experience of four years ago.

Then as now, Kucinich made radical-sounding denunciations of the war in Iraq and criticized those in his own party who had collaborated with the Bush administration in launching and continuing it. But when push came to shove, after the Democratic Party establishment torpedoed the erstwhile frontrunner Howard Dean and settled on the pro-war John Kerry as the Democratic nominee, Kucinich fell into line, endorsing Kerry, and participating in the unity parade at the Democratic National Convention, which featured a line-up of retired generals and admirals boosting Kerry’s credentials as a wartime commander-in-chief. At the time, the WSWS explained Kucinich’s role as a prop for the Democratic Party. (See “The Democratic convention and Kerry’s left apologists”).

His campaign served the function of safety valve for antiwar sentiment, offering reassurance to those most deeply opposed to the war in Iraq that their views were represented within the Democratic Party. Kucinich and Dean worked together to convince opponents of the war to vote for Kerry rather than a third-party or independent candidate.

Today, of course, Howard Dean is the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and Kucinich serves on several House committees, chairing the Domestic Policy Subcommittee of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, with jurisdiction over the Federal Communications Commission and legislation affecting the telecommunications industry.

In his second presidential campaign, Kucinich has been treated respectfully both by the media and his more conservative rivals, several of whom addressed him cordially by his first name during the New Hampshire debate. They are counting on him to repeat his yeoman work of blocking any breakaway to the left as the 2008 campaign gets into high gear. Presuming he does so, he will again have a place of honor on the platform at the Democratic National Convention.

While Kucinich continues to make antiwar speeches on the floor of the House—some of them quite detailed about the role of US oil interests, as LZ points out—his actions have facilitated the continuation of the war. First and foremost, he voted in January to install Nancy Pelosi as speaker of the House, giving the Democratic leader the power she used last month to force through a vote to approve another \$100 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Democratic Party is fully complicit in the Iraq war, and has continued to fund the war after the massive anti-war vote last November which placed Pelosi and Harry Reid at the head of the House and Senate. All three leading contenders for the party's presidential nomination—Clinton, Obama, and Edwards—share responsibility for the Iraq war, having cast votes in the Senate to authorize it, finance it, or both. All of the six “mainstream” candidates—including Biden, Dodd and Richardson—support one or another form of redeployment, which would keep tens of thousands of troops in Iraq.

RV notes, “it's easy to see that Kucinich is stuck in, and working for, a rotten bunch.” This, however, is a political choice, for which the congressman must be held responsible. Moreover, Kucinich consciously works to bolster illusions that the Democratic Party can become an antiwar party.

As he said in declaring his candidacy, “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?” The purpose of Kucinich's campaign is to create “trust” and “credibility” where they are entirely undeserved—in other words, to perpetuate a political lie.

Our three letter-writers exhibit varying degrees of agreement with Kucinich and the Democratic Party.

AH apparently rejects any prospect for socialism, writing, “The alternative to Kucinich is more extreme capitalism and endless war.” This formulation suggests that AH accepts the tedious “lesser evil” argument, urging support for Kucinich as the candidate of less extreme capitalism and perhaps fewer wars.

RV suggests that the WSWS is criticizing Kucinich unfairly because (in RV's view) we share the same position of opposition to the war in Iraq. He asks, as though to shame the WSWS, “Don't you wish to be an example of a new political ideal that, while criticizing others, may also be able to salute them for their support of ideas and policies which you both share.” Later he criticizes us for “casting off those of us who vary slightly in their beliefs ...”

RV simply fails to grasp the enormous gulf between the left-liberalism of a Kucinich and the socialist internationalism of the WSWS. Kucinich advocates a more humane and peaceful version of capitalism, as though war and social inequality were external or accidental features of the profit system, rather than essential to its nature.

Kucinich, it is true, goes further in his criticism of the Bush administration than virtually any other congressional Democrat, with his suggestion (openly in a House speech, indirectly in the presidential debate), that Bush administration officials may be guilty of war crimes. He has continued to raise the issue of impeachment even after Pelosi and other congressional Democratic leaders ruled it out.

This “leftism,” however, serves one of the basic functions of the Democratic Party, which is to block any political challenge from working

people to the profit system and the two-party monopoly of political life in the United States

For all Kucinich's talk of opposing the war, it should be noted that the Kucinich plan to end the US occupation of Iraq is not an antiwar plan at all, but a continuation of the war by other means. Under the Kucinich plan, a UN occupation of “peacekeeping troops” would take the place of American forces, with the US contributing funding.

RV observes that “even the history of American Socialists is filled with examples of those who have found themselves working within a rotten system.” Yes, and it is precisely the failure of those previous efforts to break out of the corporate-controlled two-party system and establish the political independence of the working class—largely due to the failures and betrayals of Stalinism and reformist social-democracy—that accounts for the protracted weakness and crisis of the American workers' movement.

LZ praises both the WSWS and Kucinich, while expressing disappointment with Kucinich's performance in the debate, and suggesting that ways must be found to make socialist ideas more relevant. Whatever LZ's intentions, the implication here is that socialist ideas need to be watered down, that proposals for a fundamental restructuring of the socio-economic system are somehow unrelated to the day-to-day problems confronting working people.

We could not disagree more. There is no way to seriously address the concrete questions facing working people—jobs, declining incomes, the decay of social infrastructure, the destruction of public services, the lack of opportunity for youth, attacks on democratic rights, the environmental crisis, and above all, the critical issue of war and peace—without wresting control of the vast resources (mis)appropriated by the financial oligarchy and putting them to social use.

As we pointed out in relation to RV, socialism is not simply a slightly more radical version of liberalism. It represents an opposed perspective and world outlook, based on an understanding of the irreconcilable conflict of interests between the capitalist class and the working class, the necessary struggle of the working class to put an end to the profit system.

The only way to end the war in Iraq and prevent coming wars against Iran, Syria or some other US target is to address the fundamental cause of war itself, which lies not in the psychological derangement of George Bush and Dick Cheney, but in the socio-economic structure of 21st century capitalism.

The economic contractions of imperialism, which have erupted in the case of the Iraq war, can be resolved only by the establishment of socialism. A critical first step in this struggle, in the United States, is a decisive break from the two-party system and the establishment of an independent party of the working class based on a socialist and internationalist program. Accomplishing this requires continuous political exposure of the class character of the Democratic Party and all its representatives.

Patrick Martin, for the WSWS editorial board



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