

House Speaker Pelosi lashes out at antiwar protesters

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15 October 2007

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the most powerful Democrat in Washington, normally maintains a public display of sympathy towards the mass opposition to the war in Iraq—an opposition which propelled the Democrats into control of the House and Senate in the congressional elections last November.

But in the course of a press interview October 9, reported the following morning in the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Washington Post*, Pelosi gave vent to the resentment and hostility that leading Democrats actually feel towards the antiwar protest movement.

The *Monitor's* news account of the interview was relatively restrained, focusing on Pelosi's complaint that antiwar protesters should target the Republican congressional delegation, not the Democratic, because it was the Republicans who through filibusters in the Senate were sustaining Bush's war policy.

Asked about criticism of the failure (or more accurately, refusal) of the congressional Democratic majority to take action to put an end to the war in Iraq, despite the overwhelming antiwar opinion among Democratic voters, Pelosi said, "I am well aware of the unhappiness of the base."

She told reporters that antiwar demonstrators had established seemingly permanent protest encampments outside her home in San Francisco several months, and more recently outside her Washington home as well.

The real venom in Pelosi's comments was reported by *Washington Post* Capitol Hill columnist Dana Milbank, one of those in attendance at the press interview. While Pelosi invariably maintains a publicly smiling posture, he wrote, "her spirits soured instantly when somebody asked about the anger of the Democratic 'base' over her failure to end the war in Iraq."

"Look," she said, "I had, for five months, people

sitting outside my home, going into my garden in San Francisco, angering neighbors, hanging their clothes from trees, building all kinds of things—Buddhas? I don't know what they were—couches, sofas, chairs, permanent living facilities on my front sidewalk."

Pelosi continued: "If they were poor and they were sleeping on my sidewalk, they would be arrested for loitering, but because they have 'Impeach Bush' across their chest, it's the First Amendment."

Pelosi is married to a multimillionaire investor, and her comments were charged with social resentment as well as political hostility. The antiwar protesters are not only unwelcome because they expose her hypocritical pretense to opposing the Iraq bloodbath—they are dirty, ragged and disreputable, and irritate the neighbors.

Pelosi's remark—imagine that riffraff "sleeping on my sidewalk"—is reveals the enormous social distance between the masses of working people, housewives, students who oppose the war, and the privileged ruling elite. And her disparaging reference to the First Amendment demonstrates the hostility of a big business politician towards the democratic rights of the working class.

In elaborating on this comment, Pelosi tried to backtrack from her spontaneous display of her real attitude towards antiwar activists. "They are advocates," she said. "We are leaders."

And "leaders," of course, have to be practical. "We have to make responsible decisions in the Congress that are not driven by the dissatisfaction of anybody who wants the war to end tomorrow," Pelosi continued. "The war has eclipsed everything," said. "And while I am very proud of the ratings that Democrats have on every issue you can name, I don't disagree with the public evaluation that we have not done well in ending this war."

The Democratic leader rebuked those antiwar activists who have begun to recognize that congressional Democrats, not merely the Republicans, are opposed to ending the war.

“I think it is a waste of time for them to go after Democratic members,” Pelosi argued. “They ought to just persuade Republican members who are representing areas that are opposed to the war.”

Pelosi herself faces such a challenge. Antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan has announced that she would run as an independent candidate for Congress against Pelosi next year, because of the decision by Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid last May to push through an emergency funding bill to finance the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Democrats could not be fairly accused of failing to carry out their electoral mandate, Pelosi claimed: “We said we would change the debate; we would fight to end the war. We never said we had the veto pen or the signature pen.”

She concluded with the claim, incessantly repeated by the congressional Democratic leadership, that it is White House veto power and filibusters by Senate Republicans which have blocked any change in Iraq war policy.

“It is clear now that the Senate is not going to be able to do much to overcome the 60- vote barrier that would send a bill to the president’s desk,” Pelosi said. “But that does not mean the House will not move to ... responsible, safe redeployment of our troops, hopefully to end by next year.”

This is the “big lie” that the Democratic leadership—with the full support of the media—has sought to use to excuse its own complicity with the war and cover up the fundamental agreement of both parties to continue the military occupation of Iraq indefinitely.

Pelosi, Reid & Co. have deliberately refused to take the action that they have within their power, cutting off funds for the war, which does not require a filibuster-proof or veto-proof majority.

A simple majority in either house of Congress could have blocked war funding last May. But with the Bush administration threatening that critical military operations would have to be curtailed by mid-June if the funding was not approved, Pelosi and Reid caved in and agreed to push through the emergency appropriations bill.



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