

Antiwar “Lefts” embrace ultra-right Republican candidate Ron Paul

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Over the last several months, a section of the antiwar protest movement in the US has turned with increasing enthusiasm towards the candidacy of Ron Paul, the long-time Republican Congressman from Texas, who is seeking his party's presidential nomination.

With a stable of leading Democratic and Republican candidates committed to the continued occupation of Iraq and extension of US military power around the world, Paul's promotion of a “non-interventionist” US foreign policy and his criticisms of the Patriot Act and other attacks on civil liberties have won him support from a section of politically inexperienced students looking for a means to oppose the war.

The Texas congressman's maverick image has been further enhanced by the vitriol with which his fellow Republican candidates responded to comments Paul made during a debate in Iowa, when he said terrorism was chiefly a response to US meddling in the Middle East. This was followed by the decision of Fox News to exclude him from the debate on the eve of the New Hampshire primary.

That Paul can be construed as an “antiwar candidate,” is a measure of how far to the right the American political and media establishment has moved. It is one thing, however, for the politically naïve to be fooled by his demagoguery; it is quite another for ostensibly “left” commentators to deliberately conceal his reactionary politics and perpetuate the fraud that the former Libertarian Party candidate for president can be a catalyst for building a powerful antiwar movement.

Take for example, Alexander Cockburn, who wrote in his regular column in the *Nation* magazine that Paul is “rock-solid against war and empire and the neo-liberal corporate state,” adding that the Texas Republican is “a principled fellow who's won passionate support (and millions in modest cash contributions) from ordinary Americans.”

Cockburn's colleague Jeff Taylor, in a “Letter to a Liberal Friend” posted on the *Counterpunch* web site, argues that Paul's right-wing policies will actually broaden the base of the antiwar movement, presumably because the working class can only be attracted on the basis of nationalism, xenophobia and other reactionary appeals.

“Not only does Ron Paul represent Jeffersonian values usually termed ‘conservative’ or ‘libertarian’ today (fidelity to the Constitution, frugal government, states' rights, Second Amendment, national sovereignty), but he is also a leading example of support for Jeffersonian positions nowadays described as ‘liberal’ or ‘leftist’ (e.g. opposition not only to the Iraq War but to war in general, anti-imperialism, ending the federal war on drugs, hostility to the Patriot Act and other violations of civil liberties). This accounts for the wide appeal of the Paul campaign. It's precisely the sort of trans-ideological, cross-generational populist-libertarian-moralist coalition that I was hoping to see with a [Wisconsin Democratic Senator Russ] Feingold presidential campaign.”

In “An Open Letter to the Antiwar Left: Ron Paul Deserves Our Attention,” posted on the *Counterpunch* web site, Joshua Frank, co-editor of DissidentVoice.org, continues along these lines, arguing that a viable antiwar movement can only be built by blurring the lines of left and right

politics.

“This is not about Rep. Paul as an individual per se, but about his grassroots following,” Frank writes. “He's exciting many newcomers to the [antiwar] movement and that must be welcomed. We certainly don't share the same views with all who have latched on to his campaign, but on the issue of the Iraq war we are in total agreement. One doesn't have to be a member of the left to oppose empire.”

Having long ago rejected the possibility or desirability of building a socialist alternative to the two-party system, and having worked for years in their failed efforts to push the Democratic Party to the left, Cockburn & Co. hope promoting Paul will be a more effective means of influencing the two-party system to end the war. As Frank put it, “Rep. Paul's call to end the war needs to be supported...We need to monkey-wrench the war issue so the media and the big party candidates cannot ignore it.”

The struggle against war cannot be successful by appealing to the powers-that-be. This war and the explosion of American militarism in general is not just the product of the circle of neo-conservatives in the White House but is deeply rooted in objective economic and historical conditions, above all the decline in the global position of American capitalism. There is a general consensus in both political parties that military power be used to reassert US hegemony over America's economic rivals by seizing control of the strategic energy resources of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The only means of putting an end to war, therefore, is by putting an end to the capitalist system that produces it. Far from opposing the present economic and political set up, Ron Paul is one of the most vociferous defenders of the profit system and America's ruling elite, saying, that the “rights of all private property owners” are the key to “maintain a free society.”

Paul's criticisms of the Iraq War and the Bush administration are entirely tactical and stem from his ultra-nationalist and isolationist outlook, not any principled opposition to American imperialism.

This is demonstrated by reviewing his record. During the debate on the floor of the House of Representatives in October 2002 Paul, a former Air Force officer and senior member of the House Foreign Relations Committee, rose to speak against the resolution authorizing Bush to launch war against Iraq.

His chief criticism was that ceding Congress' power to declare war to the president ran the danger of giving ultimate authority over US foreign interventions to the United Nations, whose resolutions Bush had cited to prepare war against Iraq.

Rather than UN resolutions, Paul said, “I happen to like it more when the president speaks about unilateralism and national security interests” to declare war. When the US “depends on the UN for our instructions,” he insisted, “we end up in no-win wars.” The first President Bush “didn't go all the way” in the first Gulf War, Paul complained, because G.H.W. Bush said “the UN did not give him permission to.” When you go “through the backdoor” with UN-declared wars, Paul said, “wars last longer and you

do not have a completion, like we had in Korea and Vietnam.”

A month after the US invasion of Iraq, Paul took the floor of Congress to promote his “American Sovereignty Restoration Act” to end US participation in the United Nations. He said Bush deserved some credit for “ultimately upholding the principle that American national security is not a matter of international consensus, and that we don’t need UN authorization to act.” He warned if the US did not leave the UN, its “global planners” would establish a “true world government” that would “interfere not only in our nation’s foreign policy matters, but in our domestic policies as well” and “America as we know it will cease to exist.”

Paul voted to authorize the war against Afghanistan. His criticisms of the Iraq War are conditional and tactical, chiefly centering on the complaint that it is undermining “national defense” by overstressing US military forces and its high cost is creating ever-greater economic dependence on foreign powers and potential enemies like “Communist China.”

Who is Ron Paul?

Attracted at a young age to the free market and anti-socialist nostrums of Ayn Rand and Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises—the father of the modern libertarian movement—Paul entered political life in 1964 when he became involved with the presidential campaign of Republican Senator Barry Goldwater, a bitter opponent of federal welfare programs, labor unions and civil rights legislation.

In 1974 he ran for Congress as a Republican candidate and lost the election. But he won a special election in 1976, after President Gerald Ford appointed Paul’s former opponent to a federal position.

Paul was eventually able to hold his seat in a regular election, and during his terms in Congress he ingratiated himself with the most right-wing elements of the political establishment. He was one of only a handful of Republican congressmen to endorse Ronald Reagan for president against Ford in 1976, and he used his seat on the House Banking Committee to advocate complete banking deregulation and the abolishing of the Federal Reserve Board.

The favor was returned, as Paul was able to gain the backing of the ultra-rich, such as multi-billionaire Charles Koch, CEO of Koch Industries, the largest privately held company in the United States, and Steve Forbes, who would later be instrumental in financing Paul’s reelection campaigns in the 1990s.

After a failed US Senate bid in the mid-1980s, Paul briefly returned to the practice of medicine. In his private practice, he refused to accept Medicare or Medicaid payments from patients, claiming they were paying with “stolen money.” He then launched a presidential campaign as the Libertarian Party candidate in 1988.

The political hallmark of Paul is a combination of populist and even left-sounding rhetoric and the most right-wing positions. This is especially apparent in his economic policies. Paul often denounces “corporate welfare” and the influence that large corporations have within government. He also voices opposition to an inflationary monetary policy on the grounds that the real wages of workers are being eroded.

His actual policy proposals, however, are based entirely on removing any restrictions on corporations and wealthy individuals to amass more wealth and exploit workers even more brutally. In this area, Paul is farther to the right than any other Republican seeking the nomination.

He wishes to eliminate income taxes completely by abolishing virtually every federal department and domestic program. Paul advocates the elimination of the Department of Education, Social Security, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, minimum wage laws, unemployment insurance, and virtually every other gain won by the struggle of previous generations of workers.

Paul blames “illegal immigration” for a whole host of social ills, from the spread of disease, to crime, to the lowering of workers’ wages. He has

also proposed amending the Constitution to remove birthright citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants, writing in 2006: “The recent immigration protests in Los Angeles have brought the issue to the forefront, provoking strong reactions from millions of Americans. The protesters’ cause of open borders is not well served when they drape themselves in Mexican flags and chant slogans in Spanish . . . We must reject amnesty for illegal immigrants in any form. We cannot continue to reward lawbreakers and expect things to get better. . . . Birthright citizenship similarly rewards lawbreaking, and must be stopped. As long as illegal immigrants know their children born here will be citizens, the perverse incentive to sneak into this country remains strong.”

This thinly veiled racist demagoguery has earned Paul the praise of reactionaries such as CNN anchor Lou Dobbs and the support of extreme right elements, from members of the Minutemen Project to Don Black, founder of the white supremacist group Stormfront, who donated \$500 to Paul’s campaign.

In his campaign ads in Michigan, Paul sought to divert anger over the destruction of autoworkers’ jobs and living standards with appeals to anti-immigrant and national chauvinism. The North American Free Trade Agreement, he said, was “just one part of a plan to erase the borders...and create a single nation out of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, with a new unelected bureaucracy and money system. Forget about controlling immigration under this scheme. And a free America, with limited, constitutional government, would be gone forever.”

As he did on the eve of the invasion of Iraq on numerous occasions Paul has promoted the idea that the United Nations is a conspiratorial organization planning to implement a “new world order” and that the World Trade Organization is a plot by a “global elite” to strip America of its sovereignty.

Paul’s brand of libertarianism doesn’t prevent him from opposing abortion in terms that are similar to those of the religious fundamentalists. Paul likens abortion to state-sanctioned murder, stating, “Abortion on demand is the ultimate State tyranny . . . Unlike Nazi Germany, which forcibly sent millions to the gas chambers (as well as forcing abortion and sterilization upon many more), the new regime has enlisted the assistance of millions of people to act as its agents in carrying out a program of mass murder.”

He has proposed legislation that would remove from all federal courts the jurisdiction to hear cases relating to abortion. This would effectively overturn *Roe v. Wade* and allow the states to criminalize all abortion procedures.

Paul has similarly tried to remove federal court jurisdiction to decide whether the phrase “under God” can be included in the Pledge of Allegiance, voted to ban federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, and voted to prevent same-sex couples from adopting. His consistent record of attacking democratic rights has prompted his supporters at *Lew Rockwell.com* to write a column approvingly posing the question, “Will Ron Paul Be the Candidate of the Christian Right?”

Ron Paul’s appeal to the extreme right and fascist groups is not a new phenomenon. In a recent article published by the *New Republic*, James Kurchick highlights the contents of some of Ron Paul’s newsletters, published during the time after Paul finished his first terms in Congress and returned to the practice of medicine. Kurchick describes an issue of the newsletter that was published after the 1992 riots in Los Angeles in the following manner, “‘Order was only restored in L.A. when it came time for the blacks to pick up their welfare checks three days after rioting began,’ read one typical passage. According to the newsletter, the looting was a natural byproduct of government indulging the black community with ‘civil rights, quotas, mandated hiring preferences, set-asides for government contracts, gerrymandered voting districts, black bureaucracies, black mayors, black curricula in schools, black tv shows, black tv anchors, hate crime laws, and public humiliation for anyone who

dares question the black agenda.’ It also denounced ‘the media’ for believing that ‘America’s number one need is an unlimited white checking account for underclass blacks.’”

A newsletter issue reporting on the Louisiana Senate primary election campaign of former Ku Klux Klan wizard David Duke in 1990 stated, “our priority should be to take the anti-government, anti-tax, anti-crime, anti-welfare loafers, anti-race privilege, anti-foreign meddling message of Duke, and enclose it in a more consistent package of freedom.”

In response to the New Republic exposé, Ron Paul issued a statement on his website claiming that material in the articles are not his words but were contributed by numerous writers for his newsletter, which Paul did not edit and that Paul was not aware of what was being published. It is entirely unbelievable that Paul had no knowledge of the content of articles printed under his name for over a decade.

Moreover, Paul has repeatedly made his opposition to civil rights legislation clear. As recently as 2004, he marked the 40th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—which outlawed the system of apartheid-like racial segregation in Southern schools and public places during the Jim Crow period—by denouncing the measure from the floor of Congress for infringing on the “rights of private property owners,” including the “customer service practices of every business in the country.”

Such reactionary politics make a farce out of the efforts to paint Paul in “antiwar” colors. That he commands any following at all is due entirely to the absence of a genuine opposition to militarism among the leading contenders for the presidential race in both big business parties. In such a vacuum, extreme right figures can emerge. A serious struggle against war requires steadfast opposition to such reactionary politics and all those who compromise with it.



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