

Kucinich, the Democrats and the impeachment of Bush

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In the days since he joined in a unanimous vote of his fellow Democrats in the House of Representatives to block a floor debate on his own impeachment resolution and instead send it to the House Judiciary Committee, Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich has continued to posture as an intransigent opponent of the Bush administration.

The vote to refer the resolution to the Judiciary Committee was tantamount to burying it, as the Democrats and Kucinich himself were fully aware. The Democratic chairman of the committee, Rep. John Conyers of Detroit, has repeatedly stated his opposition to pursuing an impeachment investigation against Bush or Vice President Dick Cheney.

The Democratic leadership wanted at all costs to avoid a debate on impeachment on the floor of the House, since it would expose the opposition of the entire party leadership and a large majority of Democratic House members to something that is broadly supported by Democratic voters, and highlight the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party and duplicitous nature of its nominal opposition to the policies of the Bush administration.

Kucinich, rather than opposing this maneuver by the House Democratic leadership, chose to support it in order to provide political cover for the party tops and maintain the illusion that the Democratic Party can be pressured into seriously opposing militarism, war and the assault on democratic rights.

While the major daily newspapers and broadcast television networks have suppressed coverage of the resolution, which tied up the House of Representatives for much of Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Kucinich has made several media appearances and some cable television programs have devoted significant airtime to the question.

On Friday morning, for instance, Kucinich appeared on the “Democracy Now!” program on National Public Radio, outlining the case for impeaching Bush for an illegal war in Iraq in which 4,000 Americans and “one million innocent Iraqis” have been killed.

He also appeared on the right-wing “O’Reilly Factor” program on Fox News, where he claimed that the impeachment resolution was still alive. After host Bill O’Reilly noted contemptuously that Kucinich’s own party had killed the proposal, the Ohio congressman protested, “It was referred to committee. It wasn’t tabled.”

Kucinich introduced the resolution Monday as a special member’s bill, under a rule requiring action within 48 hours. As a

result, there were only two alternatives open to the House: an immediate floor debate on impeachment, followed by an up-or-down vote, or referral to the Judiciary Committee.

The House voted by 251-166 to refer the bill. Most Republicans voted “no,” and every Democrat, including Kucinich, voted in favor of referring the bill to committee. The Republicans wanted an immediate debate and vote because they were confident that few Democrats would actually back Bush’s removal and they hoped to embarrass them by drawing attention to the gulf between their anti-Bush rhetoric and their actions. The Democrats sought to avoid an immediate debate and vote for the same reasons.

While the Democratic and Republican leadership—and Conyers himself—maintain that there will be no hearings and that the impeachment resolution is effectively dead, Kucinich continues to pretend that the resolution can proceed through the normal legislative process, with hearings to be followed by a committee vote, then a vote of the full House, like the Republican resolution impeaching President Bill Clinton in December of 1998.

He told several interviewers over the past two days that if the Judiciary Committee takes no action for 30 days—a virtual certainty—he will reintroduce the resolution with even more than the 35 articles enumerated in his current bill, and seek to force consideration. The Ohio congressman has only been able to attract three co-sponsors however, making any such gesture futile.

Kucinich makes a great display of opposing the war and the Bush administration, but he does not oppose the Democratic Party leadership in Congress, which has been the war’s enabler. In his interview with “Democracy Now!” he claimed, “There is no rational, logical reason why the Judiciary Committee should not hear—have hearings on these articles.”

When his interviewer noted the opposition to impeachment on the part of Conyers and other top House Democrats, Kucinich replied, “I have a great respect for John Conyers, I have a great respect for [House Speaker] Nancy Pelosi, but this goes beyond politics.”

He seemed to appeal to the Democratic leadership, pleading, “We need to evaluate what Congress’s rightful role is here. You know, one of the founders of our nation made it very clear that Congress had a role that was not simply to pass laws, but to ask questions of the executive. This is what helped to create a powerful three-branches-of-government concept that was imbued in the Constitution, co-equality, so that we wouldn’t have a monarch. George Bush has acted in a way that has separated him

from the rule of law. Congress must hold him accountable.”

Kucinich also argued that if Congress did not take action against Bush, it might find itself embarrassed when Bush was ultimately prosecuted for war crimes before some future international tribunal.

In an interview with the liberal *BuzzFlash* web site Friday, Kucinich again rejected suggestions that Wednesday’s vote had effectively killed the impeachment resolution. “This is a very grave matter that cannot be and will not be swept under the rug by some kind of a legislative trap,” he claimed.

He also argued—in response to suggestions that it was too late to impeach Bush, who is scheduled to leave office next January—that a vote in the House of Representatives, even without Senate action to remove Bush from office, could make it more difficult for the administration to launch a war against Iran.

“We cannot wait for after the election,” he said. “We don’t know what could happen in the next six months with respect to a further erosion of our democratic process. And what the impeachment process would do would be to have a chilling effect on further abuses of the Constitution and on creating another war.”

There is certainly a grave danger of American military action against Iran, but there should be no illusions that the Democratic congressional leadership will take any action to prevent it. Only last September the Senate, by a huge majority, including the votes of Senator Hillary Clinton and dozens of Democrats, adopted a resolution branding the Iranian Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization and implicitly endorsing US military action.

Despite Kucinich’s efforts to sustain the antiwar pretenses of the congressional Democrats, there is virtually no chance that the Judiciary Committee will schedule impeachment hearings.

Chairman Conyers himself introduced legislation for impeachment hearings in April 2005, but that was when both houses of Congress were controlled by the Republicans. He was then the ranking minority member on the committee, and the Republican majority could be counted on to block any action.

At the time, Conyers told *Harper’s* magazine that he was introducing the bill, despite its all-but-certain fate, “to take away the excuse that we didn’t know. So that two or four or ten years from now, if somebody should ask, ‘Where were you, Conyers, and where was the United States Congress?’ when the Bush administration declared the Constitution inoperative and revoked the license of parliamentary government, none of the company now present can plead ignorance or temporary insanity, can say that ‘somehow it escaped our notice’ that the president was setting himself up as a supreme leader exempt from the rule of law.”

These words of three years ago condemn the actions of Conyers, House Speaker Pelosi and the rest of the Democratic leadership today—and underscore Kucinich’s role as a “left” fig leaf for a party that is unalterably committed to the defense of the interests of American imperialism.

A spokesman for Pelosi said, “Speaker Pelosi will continue to lead legislative efforts to find a new direction in Iraq but believes that impeachment would create a divisive battle, be a distraction from Congress’ efforts to chart a new course for America’s working families and would ultimately fail.”

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, Senator Barack Obama, have adopted the same position.

Another top Democrat added his voice to the chorus against impeachment this week—Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean, the erstwhile antiwar presidential candidate of 2004. He told a breakfast meeting with reporters, sponsored by the *Christian Science Monitor*, that the Democrats had no mandate for impeachment from their victory in the 2006 congressional elections.

“My view is that the American people hired us in 2006 because they did not like the direction that the country was going in and what they wanted to see was someone that was willing to do something positive and get something done in Washington that was for their benefit,” Dean said. “They didn’t send us there to impeach the president.” Dean declined to express any personal opinion on whether Bush “may or may not deserve to be impeached.”

Impeachment in itself does not offer any genuine answer to the policies of war, social reaction and attacks on democratic rights that arise from the failure of the capitalist system and the political monopoly exercised by two parties of the American financial aristocracy. Even were it to succeed, the impeachment of Bush and/or Cheney would not significantly alter the agenda that is dictated by the interests of the ruling elite.

However, the refusal of the nominal political opposition—the Democratic Party—to pursue the course laid down by the Constitution to remove officials clearly guilty of “high crimes and misdemeanors” demonstrates the complicity of the Democrats in the crimes of the Bush administration. It underscores the need for the building of an independent political movement of the working class based on a socialist program to put an end to war and defend democratic rights.



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