

An exchange with an ex-Maoist booster for Obama

15 July 2008

The following letter was sent to the World Socialist Web Site by Carl Davidson in response to the article “Obama’s swing to right sparks warnings from ‘left’ backers” posted on the WSWS July 9. It is followed by a reply by the article’s author, Bill Van Auken.

Maoist shill for Democrats?

That’s a hoot; I’ll add it to my collection. The pro-war Dem officeholders around here would raise an eyebrow or two, seeing how they’ve tried to get me to ‘shill’ for them to no avail.

No, I’ve spent the last forty years of my life trying to figure out effective ways to supplant the Dems with something that serves the working class. I’m still plugging away at it—although in ways I’m sure are not to your liking. Call me a ‘post Maoist, neo-Bukharinite revisionist,’ if you like. It’d be a little more accurate, although I prefer cyber-Marxist for the 21st Century, a version of what the ‘Old Mole’ might favor, were he still around. See <http://carldavidson.blogspot.com> for more.

But some of your analysis is amusing. It’s not required for me to take the antiwar movement to the Democrats. They’ve been in it from day one, before the war broke out even.

In Chicago, local Dems as well as those to their left, planned the first big antiwar rallies; Dem officials were on the platform with others to their left as well, and large numbers, if not a majority, of the marchers were people who were Democrats or voted for them, too. We got the Chicago city council, almost entirely Democrats, to vote twice against the war. With many Dem signatures, we got ‘Out Now’ on the ballot in Cook County in 2006, winning by 81 to 19, without over 800,000 votes for it, mostly Democrats.

Does this mean these Democrats are in conflict with many top leaders and the ‘DLC Blue Dogs’ of their party? It certain does. That’s why it’s silly to ignore it.

But where would you suggest that we start purging Dems from the ranks of those opposed to the war in order to make it more to your liking? Shall we exclude the ‘Out Now’ bloc of four left-progressive aldermen in Chicago? They were the ones there with us on day one.

This war will end when a president, either a Dem or GOP,

gives the order and/or a Democratic Congress cuts off the money. They won’t be the engine driving the decisions, but it doesn’t require the overthrow of the two-party system to do it.

If you think it does, make your case. I’d love to see it.

Meanwhile, to end this war sooner rather than later, which is our internationalist duty, our task is figuring out the strategy and tactics of getting from here to there. And believe me, ending this war will require tactical alliances with forces even to the right of some liberal Dems.

As for Obama, his position on the war is not the same as ours, and never has been, a point we’ve always made. But an Obama White House is a far better target than a McCain White House for mobilizing against this war and bringing it to an earlier end. That’s what makes him our ‘best option,’ but you’re too much a prisoner of old ideas to take advantage of it.

Carl Davidson

Mr. Davidson’s letter fully confirms the brief characterization of him contained in my article dealing with the “left” apologists of Barack Obama and their varied reactions to his lurch to the right in the wake of his victory in the Democratic primaries.

I mentioned him in relation to the group “Progressives for Obama” headed Tom Hayden, the former Vietnam War protester who served as a longtime Democratic state legislator in California. Davidson is the webmaster for the group’s site. I was frankly concerned that the significance of his involvement would escape many WSWS readers, particular those of the younger generation.

Frankly, his views on the Democratic Party—which are not all that different from those of the “progressive aldermen” of Chicago whom he extols in his letter—would be of little or no interest outside of his political history in the 1960s and 1970s.

The arguments he makes are crude, the political conceptions utterly banal and there is not a hint of principle in anything he has to say. The style in this case is truly the man.

But Davidson’s political biography is emblematic of the

political trajectory of a whole socio-political layer known as the “New Left” of the 1960s. He began his political career as a leader of the Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s, campaigning on university campuses for student power and delivering lectures with titles like “the naysayer in happyland,” which expressed the influence of writers like Herbert Marcuse and his own myopic view of American society.

From there, Davidson turned to Maoism, authoring in 1973 a scurrilous attack on Trotskyism entitled “Left in Form, Right in Essence: A Critique of Contemporary Trotskyism,” which regurgitated the speeches of Stalin and the political arguments of the Stalinist secret police, the GPU.

Now, in his latest incarnation, following the Stalinist bureaucracy’s liquidation of the Soviet Union and the Maoist bureaucracy’s embrace of global capitalism, Davidson has dedicated himself to making “left” pragmatic arguments for why voting Democratic is the most effective means of ending war.

There is a clear line of continuity that runs through all of these stages of Davidson’s political career—a rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class and hostility to those who fight for its political independence.

Davidson appears to be repeating arguments that he has made previously against antiwar protesters who have criticized his orientation to the Democratic Party. The WSWS never had any confusion about the role of the Democratic Party in these protests and the work done by Davidson and others in the leadership of United for Peace and Justice and other organizations to subordinate the protest movement to the Democrats’ electoral campaigns. It is largely this bankrupt political orientation that explains the apparent contradiction of dwindling numbers participating in these protests under conditions of widening opposition to the war.

Even within this political setup, Davidson has distinguished himself with his right-wing views, functioning precisely as a “shill for the Democrats.” In the last presidential election, he was the co-author of a document entitled “Moving from Protest to Politics: Dumping Bush’s Regime in 2004,” which made the case for turning the antiwar movement into a vote-catching appendage of the Democratic Party on the platform of anybody but Bush. He went on to back John Kerry, even as the Democratic candidate indicated that, if elected, he would carry out his own “surge,” sending more troops into Iraq.

Davidson has boasted of endorsing Obama when he began climbing the ladder of the Chicago Democratic Party machine with a run for the state legislature in 1996. “I’ve been in his home,” he bragged on one radical list serve, also noting that he helped organize a fundraiser for him in the run-

up to his 2004 US Senate campaign.

Summing up his outlook—one of abject prostration before the two-party system—Davidson writes to the WSWS: “This war will end when a president, either a Dem or GOP, gives the order ... but it doesn’t require the overthrow of the two-party system to do it. If you think it does, make your case. I’d love to see it.”

We’ve made the case many times. The fundamental source of war lies not in the right-wing ideology of the Bush administration, but in the insoluble contradictions of US and world capitalism. To the extent that the two-party system and capitalism remain, new wars are inevitable. The only means of fighting this threat lies in the struggle to politically separate the working class from the domination of bourgeois politics and the Democratic Party in particular.

But, in any case, Obama is making the argument for us. He has already made it clear that the “order” he will give when he enters the White House is to draw down US combat forces in Iraq in order to escalate the war against the people of Afghanistan, while leaving behind a “residual force” that will continue the occupation and killing in Iraq itself. If this is what Davidson means by ending war, then we may well see the former Maoist making his “left” arguments for why the “good war” against the Afghans deserves the support of “progressives,” thereby assisting America’s political establishment in effecting a tactical change that it clearly becoming a consensus policy within both big business parties.

This is already a well-worn path by others veteran of the “New Left” in many countries.

As for the absurd reference to the “old mole,” Marx would have no trouble discerning the content of Davidson’s politics, and would find no need for a meaningless title like “cyber revolutionary.” He described those of his own day who sought to subordinate the nascent workers movement to the parties of the bourgeoisie as “philistines,” “quacks” and “scoundrels.”

If anything, these descriptions are mild for those supposed “lefts” and ex-radicals who seek to foment illusions in the Democratic Party today. Davidson’s evolution from Maoist ideologue to Obama booster truly places him in the category of those who learn nothing and forget nothing.

Bill Van Auken



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact