

As Republican convention opens

McCain bows to ultra-right with Palin selection

Patrick Martin
1 September 2008

The Republican National Convention was to open Monday in St. Paul, Minnesota in an abbreviated session, stripped of all ceremonies and speeches because of Hurricane Gustav, expected to make landfall in Louisiana the same day. Officials of the Republican National Committee and the campaign of Republican presidential candidate John McCain said they might scale back the event even further if Gustav becomes a major disaster.

President Bush and Vice President Cheney had already canceled planned speeches on the first night of the convention. Both were seeking to avoid appearing at the party convention during the hurricane, a forceful reminder of the Bush administration's incompetence and indifference three years ago, when Hurricane Katrina laid waste to New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

McCain and his new vice-presidential pick, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, traveled to Jackson, Mississippi Sunday to make a show of sympathy for the television cameras, visiting the state's disaster coordination center and talking with relief workers preparing for the arrival of Gustav, before resuming his campaign.

The convention opens in the wake of McCain's decision to select Palin as his running mate, passing over many more established figures in the Republican Party to choose a 44-year-old woman who 20 months ago was the part-time mayor of Wasilla, Alaska, a rural exurb of Anchorage, dealing with issues like petty crime and scheduling sled-dog races.

Palin's nomination was hailed by the extreme-right and Christian fundamentalist elements who have long dominated among Republican Party activists, and who have been largely estranged from the McCain campaign. The Alaska governor is an evangelical Protestant who opposes abortion rights even for victims of rape and incest or when the life of the mother is at stake. She opposes gay

marriage and even visitation rights for gay parents in the event of illness, and advocates the teaching of creationism in public schools.

A particularly noxious element in her background—so far little explored by the national media—is her role in the 2000 presidential contest, when she supported ultra-rightist and anti-Semite Patrick Buchanan over the two main Republican contenders that year, George W. Bush and McCain.

The Palin selection demonstrates once again the dirty secret of American politics: that semi-fascistic forces exercise near-veto power over the Republican Party. The *New York Times* reported Sunday, based on interviews with several top McCain aides, that McCain had all but decided to select Senator Joseph Lieberman, who was the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 2000, to run with him on a cross-party ticket based on all-out support for the war in Iraq.

Top aides told him—reportedly relaying warnings from several influential state party chairmen—that there would be protests on the floor of the convention if he selected a running mate who supports abortion rights, like Lieberman or former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge (a Republican).

McCain made the decision after his Democratic opponent, Barack Obama, chose Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware as his running mate August 23, passing over Hillary Clinton. The next day, McCain called Palin and invited her to meet at his Arizona estate on Thursday, where he offered her the second spot on the Republican ticket.

There is a strong element of recklessness and irresponsibility in McCain's selection. He selected not only someone without any significant national or international experience, but someone whom he does not

himself know and who is virtually unknown to the American public.

McCain had precisely one discussion with Palin this year, for 15 minutes at a conference in Washington last February, before calling her last week. His encounter with her Thursday, when he offered her the second highest position in the American government, amounted to two hours. Press accounts noted that their initial campaign bus trip—a six-hour swing from Dayton through Columbus to the outskirts of Pittsburgh—more than doubled the total time they had spent together.

The selection was so unexpected, and the decision so closely held, that there were not even any McCain-Palin signs printed for the initial rallies, with the crowds waving signs carrying only the name of the presidential candidate or his slogan, “Country First.”

Palin sought to play the card of identity politics, presenting herself as a spokeswoman for those supporters of Hillary Clinton who felt that Clinton had received sexist treatment from the media or the Obama campaign during the contest for the Democratic nomination. This posture did not go over well with the right-wing audience at the Pennsylvania rally, which booed Clinton’s name when Palin invoked her as a model.

McCain reiterated Sunday, in a series of television interviews, that the Alaska governor was the most qualified person he could have chosen for the vice presidency. Asked about previous statements that he would select the person “most prepared to take my place” in the event of a crisis, McCain replied that Palin was that person.

His interviewers, Chris Wallace of Fox News and Brian Williams of NBC, were deferential and did not directly challenge McCain’s seemingly delusional assessment of his running mate. Nor did they press the obvious contradiction between McCain’s rhetoric about the United States facing a death-struggle with worldwide Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, and his selection of Palin for the role of deputy sheriff.

There is a powerful element of “the emperor has no clothes” in the muted media response to the selection of Palin. The vice presidency has become, in the past 20 years, one of the most important offices of the capitalist state. It is obvious that Palin is, by the standards of bourgeois politics, completely unqualified for the position, and that in choosing her, McCain has called into question his own judgement as well. But there is, at least so far, an agreement not to speak this embarrassing truth, and to proceed as though McCain had simply made an

interesting and unusual, but nonetheless arguable choice.

The logic of the Palin selection is that the Republican Party must now wage a relentless and unambiguously right-wing campaign, that all talk of bipartisanship and finding common ground on divisive social and political issues must be scrapped in favor of an effort to mobilize the most frenzied and extremist elements. That such a campaign will be waged against an African-American opponent insures that there will be appeals to racial as well as Christian fundamentalist bigotry.

The choice of Palin was depicted by some media commentators as an act of political desperation, an indication that the McCain campaign sees the November 4 election as virtually unwinnable without such a political adventure. But there is another side to the selection. Insofar as McCain’s choice of Palin potentially puts a political cipher in position to assume the presidency, it demonstrates that the president and vice-president are, in the final analysis, figureheads for the state machine.

If the McCain-Palin ticket were to be elected and the incoming president, already 72 years old and a cancer victim, does not survive his term, the Pentagon, the CIA, the NSA, the FBI and all the other repressive agencies of the American state would continue to function and carry out their program of imperialist war and internal repression under a President Palin. They have, after all, continued to carry out their filthy work through the eight-year presidency of George W. Bush, who is no more “qualified” than Palin in any conventional sense.

The real government of the United States is not created by the votes of the people on the first Tuesday in November. It consists of the permanent machinery of state that serves the interests of the ruling elite, regardless of the identity of the occupant of the White House, and regardless of which of the two big business parties holds office.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact