

Senate Democrats cave in to pro-war, pro-McCain Joseph Lieberman

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19 November 2008

At a closed-door meeting Tuesday, Senate Democrats voted by a wide margin to forgo any serious measures against Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman, an avid supporter of the Bush administration's war policies who campaigned intensively for the defeated Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

The 42-13 vote to allow Lieberman to retain his chairmanship of the key Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee was entirely predictable, especially after President-Elect Barack Obama intervened directly to oppose any serious retribution against the long-time Democrat turned independent who had run as the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 2000.

The vote underscores the lack of any principled differences within the Democratic Party establishment over the war in Iraq and US imperialist policy in general. It provides one more indication of the bipartisan and right-wing course to be pursued by the incoming Obama administration.

Lieberman, a four-term senator, has caucused with the Democrats since the 2006 congressional election, when he lost the Connecticut Democratic primary race to millionaire businessman Ned Lamont, who campaigned as an opponent of the Iraq war. Having been repudiated by Democratic voters for his pro-war stance, Lieberman ran as an independent and was elected with the tacit support of key Democratic leaders and the open support of the Republican Party and the Bush administration.

He supported Bush's escalation of the war in 2007 and became an early and active backer of McCain, appearing at numerous McCain campaign events. A featured speaker at the Republican National Convention, Lieberman all but accused Obama of

treason for the Democratic candidate's one-time vote against a bill authorizing funding for the Iraq war, while praising McCain for his defiance of popular opposition to the war.

"When others wanted to retreat in defeat from the field of battle," Lieberman declared to wild cheers from the Republican delegates, "when Barack Obama was voting to cut off funding for our troops on the ground, John McCain had the courage to stand against the tide of public opinion."

In the course of the campaign, Lieberman weighed in behind Republican efforts to witch-hunt Obama as a closet socialist whose patriotism was suspect. At one point he said it was "a good question" whether Obama, who raised hundreds of millions of dollars from corporate interests, was a Marxist. He accused the Democratic candidate of failing to "put the country first" and declared that Hamas preferred Obama to McCain.

Lieberman also worked to elect Republican senatorial candidates, giving money to the campaigns of Norm Coleman of Minnesota, Gordon Smith of Oregon and Susan Collins of Maine.

Before Tuesday's Democratic caucus meeting, Lieberman confidently told the Associated Press, "I'm going into a roomful of friends."

Following the vote, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid told reporters, "Joe Lieberman is a Democrat. He is part of this caucus." A smiling Lieberman hailed the vote as "fair and forward leaning" and a signal of the Democrats' desire to forge bipartisan unity with the Republicans. "Hopefully it will go from our caucus across the aisle to the Republicans as well," he said.

He praised "the kind words that Senator Reid said about my longtime record" and "the appeal from President-Elect Obama himself that the nation now

unite to confront our very serious problems."

Party leaders almost unanimously supported the rapprochement with Lieberman. Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, the Democrats' 2004 presidential candidate, spoke in support of Lieberman at the caucus meeting and said afterward the vote was "to put aside old differences."

The Democrats' vote was a slap in the face to rank-and-file Democrats who had called for Lieberman to be removed from his chairmanship of the Homeland Security Committee. Some 45,000 Democrats had signed petitions demanding that the pro-war senator be repudiated by Senate Democrats.

Instead, the Democratic caucus voted to deliver Lieberman a slap on the wrist, removing him from the Environment and Public Works Committee, where he had chaired a subcommittee. However, he was allowed to retain his chairmanship of the more critical AirLand subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee. A key broker of the deal was Christopher Dodd, the senior senator from Connecticut and chairman of the Senate Banking Committee.

In a meeting with Senator Reid two days after the November 4 election, Lieberman effectively delivered an ultimatum, saying the loss of his chairmanship of the Homeland Security Committee—a key part of the repressive apparatus built up by the Bush administration—would be "unacceptable," implying that he might shift his allegiance to the Republican caucus in the Senate.

The Senate Democrats caved in to Lieberman despite the fact that they will not require his membership in the Democratic caucus to wield a majority in the new Senate that will take office in January. In the outgoing Senate, the Democrats have held an effective 51 to 49 majority due to the alignment with their caucus of Lieberman and another independent, Bernie Sanders of Vermont. As a result of the Democratic sweep on November 4, however, the Democrats will have a solid majority with or without Lieberman, since they picked up at least six additional seats, and could win three more seats where the final results are still pending.

Lieberman has repeatedly been repudiated by Democratic voters. In 2004, he made a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, running as a supporter of the war in Iraq, but withdrew after failing to win more than 5 percent of the vote in most of the

state primaries, including his home state of Connecticut. He was unable to secure a single delegate to the Democratic convention that year.

But he has remained a powerful figure in the Democratic Party apparatus because his defense of the global interests of American imperialism and support for US militarism are shared by the entire party leadership.



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