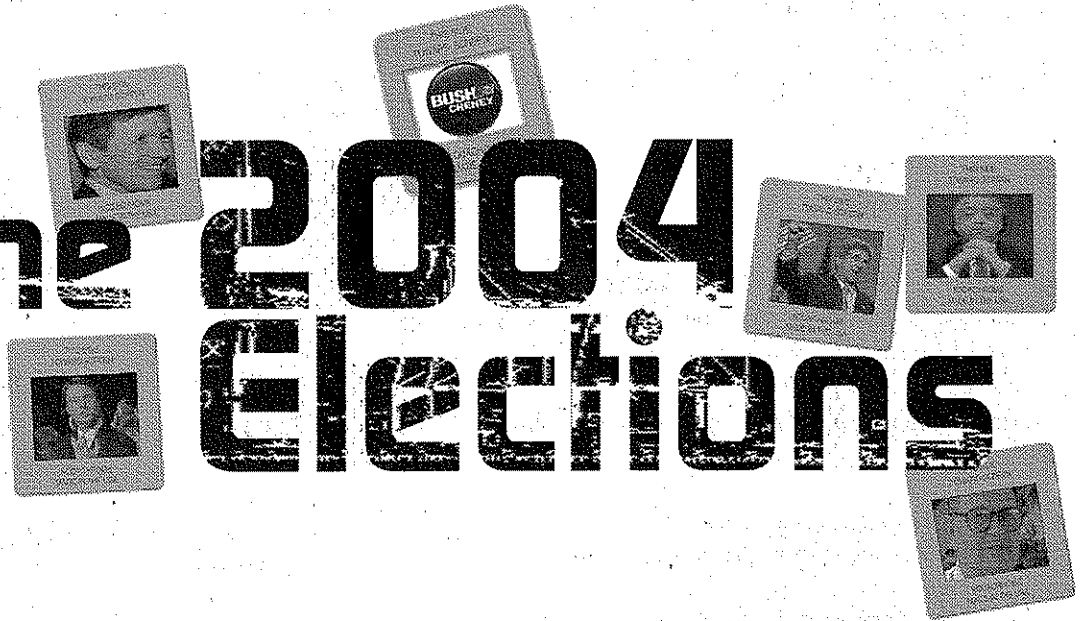


# Bush's Wars



# the 2004 Elections



# and the Movements



a Solidarity Pamphlet • \$1

# PREFACE

**9-11. USA PATRIOT Act.** Invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Massive tax giveaways to the rich. Invasion and occupation of Iraq. Austerity for working America.

Working people are facing an energized and militant corporate-military agenda, and it must be defeated.

Now, with congressional and presidential elections looming, many antiwar and global justice movement activists wonder: How should activists for social change relate to these elections? What is a viable strategy here in the United States for defeating U.S. military and corporate dominance of the world?

Solidarity is a revolutionary antiracist, feminist, socialist organization, active in the growing opposition to U.S. intervention abroad and repression at home. We do not believe that the antiwar and global justice movements "uniting" behind a Democratic presidential candidate will defeat "the Bush Agenda" — most importantly because the fundamental elements of this agenda are bipartisan.

Central to this agenda, we believe, is ensuring the global domination of U.S. corporations. In this pamphlet, we will also explore the long history of the Democratic Party, from the 1930s to Clinton, in relation to struggles from labor unions to Queer organizing to the civil rights movement. We detail the failures of the "lesser-evil" strategy, and argue for renewed activism at the grassroots coupled with participation in electoral campaigns independent of corporate dominance.

This pamphlet will not meet with agreement from everyone in the antiwar and global justice movements. But to activists who question the wisdom of supporting Democrats, to radicals dissatisfied with shallow analysis or fearmongering, to organizers willing to engage with history and experience — we appeal to you to enter into a dialogue around these issues.

We have no illusions that ours will be the dominant opinion within activist circles. Rather, we offer this as one contribution to a larger discussion of how we can fight corporate globalization, domestic repression and imperialist war.

Another world is possible!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** ..... 3

**THE DEMOCRATIC "LESSER EVIL"** ..... 5

The Antiwar Democrats: Kucinich and Sharpton  
The "Centrist" Democrats: Dean and Edwards  
The "New Democratic" Right: Kerry

**THE LEFT AND THE DEMOCRATS — LIMITS OF "LESSER EVILISM"** ..... 13

Where Do the Disagreements Between the Democrats and Republicans Come From?  
How We Got to Where We Are Today  
False Assumptions

**THE HISTORICAL RECORD: THE DEMOCRATS & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS** ... 16

The Democrats and the Decline of the CIO  
The African-American Struggle  
The Anti-Vietnam War Movement and the Democrats  
The Women's and Gay and Lesbian Movements  
The Rainbow and the Democrats: The Jackson Campaigns of 1984 and 1988

**WHY U.S. POLITICS MOVED RIGHT, 1976-PRESENT** ..... 30

Capitalist Crisis, Lean Production and the Neo-Liberal Political Consensus  
The Democrats' Rightward Drift, 1976-1984  
The Emergence of the Democratic Leadership Council, 1984-1992  
Bill Clinton and the Victory of the "New Democrats," 1992-2000

**CONCLUSION: HOW TO WASTE YOUR VOTE: THE LESSONS OF 2000** ..... 38

Impact of Mass Mobilizations  
The California Experience

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# INTRODUCTION

Since September 11, 2001, global justice and antiwar activists have confronted an emergency situation. Armed at least initially with the claim of "self-defense" in its "war on terrorism," the Bush administration's coalition — of neoconservatives, the religious right and much of the corporate capitalist class — moved to implement its agenda of empire building, domestic repression and attacks on workers, people of color, women and lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender (LGBT, or Queer) people.

The first round of this right-wing offensive met with little resistance. The Afghanistan war was short and successful for Washington in the short run — both militarily, in the defeat and collapse of the Taliban regime, and politically, in winning wide "multilateral" participation and popularity at home.

With the Iraq war, the Bush administration's legitimacy gained after the crimes of 9-11 began to wear thin. The administration's militant unilateralism, its arrogant claim of the right to change any regime not to its liking, its "preemptive war" doctrine and the tissue of lies and deceptions about "weapons of mass destruction" and mythical Iraqi ties to the terrorist al-Qaeda network, opened the road to a massive antiwar movement in Fall 2002 and Spring 2003.

Yet despite the greatest worldwide antiwar mobilization in history, the U.S. ruling class proceeded apace with a war — once again brief and militarily successful in the short run, with the rapid conquest of Iraq and the collapse of the Iraqi army. Quickly, however, the image of "liberation" has given way to the realities of deadly imperialist occupation and determined resistance in Iraq.

At home, the Bush administration has continued its attacks on civil liberties, workers, people of color and immigrants. Both the war, and the government's extreme policies of subsidizing the greedy at the expense of the needy, have created federal and state budget deficits that stagger the imagination.

Most of us feel the need to act quickly and decisively to defeat an administration that is intent upon imposing its will on the world, regardless of consequences. We are all willing to take "exceptional" actions to deal with what seems to be an "exceptional" situation.

How, then, to relate to the 2004 presidential election? Some activists put their hopes in the campaigns of explicitly

antiwar Democrats like Dennis Kucinich and Al Sharpton. Many who will work on these campaigns believe that even if Kucinich or Sharpton are not nominated, such efforts will "pull the Democrats to the left." Others in the antiwar and global justice movement may support centrist candidates like Howard Dean, who have a better chance of winning the nomination.

Other antiwar and global justice activists are committing themselves to support whomever the Democratic Party nominates in 2004 — at the time this pamphlet is written the front runner is Kerry. The 2004 elections, they believe, present a "unique opportunity." If the left, especially the antiwar and global justice movements, registers new voters and mobilizes key sectors (union members, the poor, people of color, women, Queers) it can provide the Democrats with a "margin of victory" in the 2004 elections.

"Defeating the Bush Agenda," according to advocates of this view, would not only place a Democrat in the White House in the short run, but change the long-term face of U.S. politics. If the antiwar and global justice movements can effectively support the Democrats in 2004, they maintain, the victorious Democrats will find themselves "beholden" to our constituencies. As a result, U.S. politics will move to the left.

We in Solidarity share the sense of urgency of many in the antiwar and global justice movements. We too want to stop the right-wing fanatics in the Bush White House, and we share the goal of building an effective movement for peace, equality, social and economic justice. Our difference is with the view that the Democratic Party can be a vehicle for social justice politics.

The differences between the Democrats and Republicans are real, and in some ways have widened since the decline of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the growth of an extreme religious right. The Democrats tend to give more support to the formal legal rights of minorities, women and LGBT people, and tend to favor military and political cooperation with their European and Japanese economic rivals.

At the same time, both the Democrats and Republicans remain committed to a policy of corporate power and U.S. military-political supremacy. The agendas of both parties will deepen global inequality, with growing poles of prosperity and misery at home and abroad. In response to

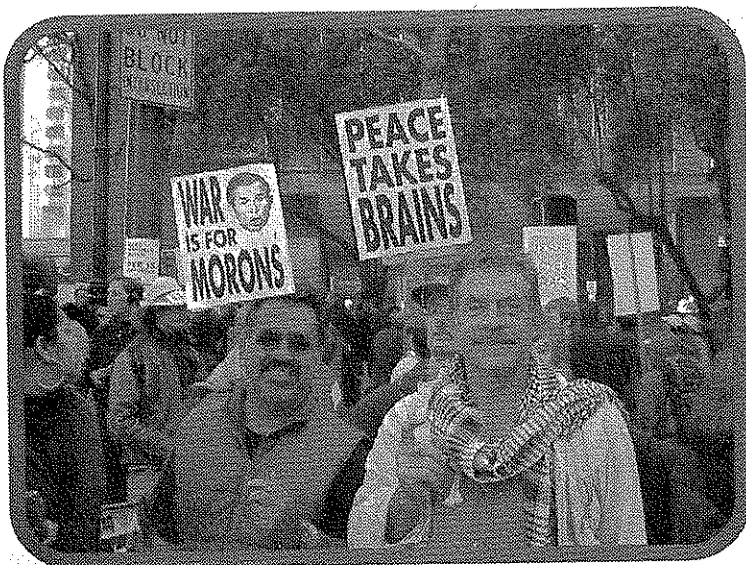
## SHOULD WE IGNORE THE ELECTORAL ARENA? WE THINK NOT.

the needs of corporate capital, both parties have moved far to the right. The needs of labor, women, Queers and people of color in the Democratic Party have been thoroughly subordinated to the corporate agenda.

The history of the past century demonstrates repeatedly that attempts to "use" the Democrats have debilitated radical social movements. This lesson runs from the CIO leaders' alliance with Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman through the mainstream Black leadership's entry (along with the moderate leaderships of the antiwar and women's movements) into Democratic politics in the 1960s and '70s, to the Jackson campaigns and the "Rainbow Insurgency" of the '80s.

The rightward drift of U.S. politics since the late 1970s is rooted in a new political and economic agenda of U.S. capitalism and the decline of these vibrant social movements — rather than in "Republican ascendancy." Capitalist dominance over both the Republican and Democratic parties ensures that these parties follow the capitalist political agenda.

Supporting "the lesser evil" has not halted this shift to the right. Instead, support for Democratic candidates among leftists, labor officials and leaders of the social protest movements has facilitated the drift. The absence of an alternative politics allows the Democratic leaders to take us for granted, and frees them to adapt to the rightward shifting "center."



In early 2004, we can see the aggressive military unilateralism and reactionary domestic policies known as "the Bush agenda" beginning to unravel before our eyes. Outside the fantasy land of right-wing ideology, world capitalism cannot be run on the basis of unilateral U.S. military and political dictates. The reality — in a world where U.S. corporations are locked in sharp competition with western European and Japanese corporations and even an emerging China — is that the U.S. superpower can't "pay the cost to be the boss" of the world alone.

With the rapid emergence of resistance in Iraq to the U.S. occupation, Washington is already turning to the United Nations and other capitalist powers (not very effectively, so far) to help police Iraq in their common imperialist interests. The timetable for installing "Iraqi self-rule" — meaning a government expected to be loyal to U.S. desires — has been accelerated.

Immediate plans for new conquests (Iran, Syria) have been shelved for lack of sufficient troops and fears of federal budget shortfalls, to say nothing of a political backlash. The U.S. economic recovery cannot be sustained on the basis of an enormous deficit induced by military spending combined with tax cuts for the rich.

The question remains — what political alternatives will be available? Will the only alternative on the table be the pro-corporate agenda of the Democrats — multilateral empire building, slightly moderated attacks on civil liberties, social programs, and working and oppressed people? Or will there be an authentic alternative, based in the movements against war and corporate globalization, demanding peace and justice at home and abroad?

We need to build a movement that whoever is elected (and it won't be either Kucinich or Sharpton) will be unable to ignore. We need to continue to build struggles that unite the antiwar and global justice movements — drawing in and educating new forces and preparing for new upsurges of militant struggle on the streets, in the communities and in the workplaces.

Campus and community speak-outs, educational within unions and churches, neighborhood house parties, public forums and debates, mass mobilization, creative protest — all these and more build movements, bring in new people and develop activists' commitments and analysis. Contrast the vibrancy and political breadth of antiwar rallies, where

# THE DEMOCRATIC “LESSER EVIL” IN 2004?

Queers and Palestinians and trade unionists and many others demonstrate their opposition to war and occupation without losing their own identities, with fundraising and sound-bite organizing for a Edwards or Kerry candidacy around a narrow, increasingly centrist call to “defeat Bush.”

With the Democratic nomination, no less the presidential election looming, hostility will emerge to issues that detract from the candidate's electability — notably, discussion of the candidate's actual positions on key issues. Everything depends on fundraising: Kucinich and Sharpton are not regarded as “serious” candidates because they didn't put together the “war chest” needed to win. And that's a major reason why Jesse Jackson Jr. endorsed Dean.

Formerly radical activists will find themselves defending Dean's support of the death penalty, Kerry's votes in favor of the war and PATRIOT Act, or the Democratic Party's opposition to proportional representation and open presidential debates.

Here, in a nutshell, is the lesser-evil dynamic at work: Activists with the best intentions find themselves embracing a completely unacceptable political framework so long as it can be packaged as “less right-wing” than the Bush administration.

Should we ignore the electoral arena? We think not. Our movements can use the electoral arena to spread our political ideas. But we need our own political vehicle for the 2004 elections — one neither dominated nor financed by corporations, one that speaks for our social movements.

Solidarity is working with other advocates of independent political action to promote an independent peace and global justice presidential campaign. We believe that the Green Party is most likely to provide a vehicle for independent politics in 2004, running a presidential campaign that takes a clear and uncompromising stance against U.S. empire, corporate globalization and the war on working and oppressed people at home and abroad. Such a campaign will help us build the political alternative we need.

We've just seen a remarkable demonstration of a small third party's ability to “shake up” the system in the San Francisco mayoral election, where Green candidate Matt Gonzalez took an astonishing 47% of the vote even though the Democratic Party brought in all their national big guns to back their millionaire pro-business, anti-homeless, “liberal” candidate.

**Who are the contenders for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2004? Where do they actually stand on the key issues antiwar and global justice activists are concerned with — the war and occupation of Iraq, corporate globalization, the rights of workers, women, people of color and Queers?**

The Democratic candidates range from opponents of the Iraq war and occupation to open supporters of Bush's war; from harsh critics of NAFTA and the FTAA to enthusiastic promoters of corporate “free trade.” We can distinguish three broad trends among the Democratic nominees — the antiwar candidacies of Kucinich and Sharpton; the centrists Dean and Edwards; and the right-wing “New Democrat” Kerry.

## Antiwar Democrats: Kucinich and Sharpton

Many believe that a strong primary campaign by New York African-American activist Al Sharpton or Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich could force the Democrats to move to the left and adopt an antiwar and pro-global justice platform in 2004. Sharpton and Kucinich are well to the left of the rest of the Democratic presidential hopefuls.

While Kucinich supported the U.S.-UN sanctions against Iraq during the Clinton administration and Bush's war against Afghanistan, he voted against Congressional authorization for the Iraq war and opposed the administration's request for \$87 billion to finance the occupation of Iraq.

Sharpton opposed the war early on, and stated that he would “unequivocally vote no” on the \$87 billion for the war. ([www.issues2000.org/2004/Al\\_Sharpton\\_War\\_=\\_Peace.htm](http://www.issues2000.org/2004/Al_Sharpton_War_=_Peace.htm)) Like all the Democratic opponents of Bush's war, Sharpton and Kucinich advocate replacing the U.S. occupation of Iraq with a UN administration. (David Corn, “The Candidates on Iraq,” *The Nation*, December 1, 2003.)

Both Sharpton and Kucinich are opposed to corporate globalization, and call for the defeat of FTAA, while Kucinich has publicly called for U.S. withdrawal from NAFTA and the WTO. Both advocate a universal, single-payer health insurance plan; a substantial raise in the minimum wage; and new legal protection for the right of workers to organize.

Dennis Kucinich



Both are staunch opponents of privatizing Social Security or raising the retirement age.

Despite Kucinich's wavering on reproductive rights, both defend the rights of women, LGBT people, and people of color. Socialists and radicals can be critical of some of Sharpton and Kucinich's positions. However, our main problem with these campaigns is not their positions, but their loyalty — which is open and explicit — to the Democratic Party.

Kucinich is admirably direct: "I have no interest in a third party candidacy. None." Instead, his goal is to bring radicals and progressives who were alienated from the Democrats in the 1990s "back to the big tent" — a tent that is controlled by the neoliberal Democratic Leadership Council (DLC). (Quotes from R. Conniff, "The Peace Candidate," *The Progressive*, April 2003) Like Eugene McCarthy in 1968, Dennis Kucinich hopes to draw antiwar activists off the streets and into the Democratic Party.

Al Sharpton shares the goal of making the Democrats more attractive to working and oppressed people. Sharpton condemns the DLC "New Democrats" as "elephants in donkey's clothes... [who] pretend to be Democrats but they're really Republicans." The Democrats' attempt to imitate the Republicans is futile in his opinion:

*This centrist stuff doesn't work. Centrist stuff doesn't work because people would rather have an authentic person, even if they're wrong, than to have a cheap imitator. And those that are being abandoned have less reason to come out while you seek to go get somebody that will never come your way. So we've been told, Blacks, Latinos, gays and lesbians, "Y'all just be invisible, disappear, come and vote for us but we can't be seen with y'all while we go get the white moderate vote." And for 12 years they been going to get the white moderate vote and the white moderate vote has gone against them every time. (Jeffrey McNary, "Al Sharpton is Saying Something," *abdn Journal*, August 20, 2003 at [www.al2004.org/news/news20.htm](http://www.al2004.org/news/news20.htm))*

Sharpton, like Jackson in 1984 and 1988, hopes to convince the Democratic Party leadership that moving to the left will pay off in an electoral victory in 2004. Yet the "New Democratic" mainstream of the party has rejected that approach for more than twenty years, embracing instead appeals to "moderate" and "conservative" white middle-income voters in the suburbs.

Al Sharpton



Sharpton's quest to bring the Democrats "back to their roots" among working people, oppressed racial minorities, women and LGBT people is doomed to failure. The strategy of mounting a

strong left-populist challenge in the Democratic presidential primaries has been tried before, by Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988. The tragedy of the Rainbow Coalition — the marginalization of the Jackson insurgency will be analyzed in detail below — can only be repeated in 2004.

Sharpton is also quite explicit that he hopes to follow Jesse Jackson's footsteps in increasing the number of African-American elected officials. Whatever success this project may achieve, the neoliberal DLC's organizational and ideological hegemony over the Democratic Party guarantees that neither Kucinich nor Sharpton will receive the nomination — and more, that antiwar Democrats will have little impact on the party's platform, candidates, or campaign in 2004.

What then? As both Sharpton and Kucinich refuse to countenance the possibility of an independent campaign, where do antiwar and global justice activists who campaign for them go when they do not receive the nomination? Like supporters of Jackson in 1984 and 1988, they will be left without any ongoing independent organization after the Democratic National Convention.

Sharpton and Kucinich will deliver their most of their supporters to the campaign of whichever centrist or right-wing "New Democrat" is nominated in 2004. While Jackson got some token representation on the Democratic National Committee and a place in a meager voter registration drive in 1988, neither Kucinich nor Sharpton will receive even that much after what will probably be much more anemic primary campaigns.

## "Centrist" Democrats: Dean & Edwards

Most advocates of "the lesser evil" recognize that neither Sharpton nor Kucinich will be the Democrats' nominee in 2004. They are preparing to support whomever the Democrats nominate as a means of "defeating the Bush Agenda."

Many believe that former Vermont Governor Howard Dean or Senator Clark represent viable candidates opposed to the Bush war drive.

Are either of the Democratic "centrists" a real alternative to Bush or are they merely Clinton-Gore clones, without Clinton's scandals?

Dean opposed the Bush administration's unilateral war against Iraq fairly early on, rejecting Bush's lies that the Saddam Hussein regime possessed weapons of mass destruction: "While Saddam Hussein's regime was clearly evil...it did not present an immediate threat to U.S. security that would justify going to war." ([www.deanforamerica.com](http://www.deanforamerica.com))

Dean's major problem with Bush's Iraq war was that the United States waged this war alone. Like most of the Democratic critics of the second Gulf War, he supported continued UN-U.S. sanctions — which had claimed the lives of nearly one million Iraqi children in twelve years. Dean would have also supported a war waged under the auspices of the UN or NATO.

Dean and most of the Democratic critics of Bush's Iraq policy would have preferred a multilateral, rather than unilateral, imperial strategy. They believed this was a better way to make the Middle East and the Gulf safe for global corporate investment. Once the invasion began, Dean "rallied around the flag" and toned down his criticisms of the Bush administration's aggression against Iraq. In the March 2003 issue of *National Review*, Dean said "It's hard to criticize the president when you've got troops in the field. We all have got to support the troops."

Subsequently Dean has made clear his opposition to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq on numerous occasions. Dean's "7-Point Plan for Multilateral Reconstruction in Iraq" (April 9, 2003) called for NATO troops to take over occupation duties, and the UN Security Council to establish an "international body" to establish civilian authority. He envisions a "democratic transition will take between 18 to 24 months, although troops should expect to be in Iraq for a longer period." ([www.deanforamerica.com](http://www.deanforamerica.com))

Dean's opposition to Iraqis ruling themselves was evident during the second debate among the Democratic presidential candidates:

*We cannot lose the peace in Iraq...This was a mistake, this war...But if we leave Iraq to chaos, Al Qaeda may move in; if we leave Iraq to a fundamentalist Shiite regime with Iranian influence, we will be in both circumstances worse off than we were when Saddam Hussein was President.* ("Full Transcript: Democratic Presidential Candidates Debate," FDCH E-Media, September 9, 2003, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-serv/politics/transcripts/090903debatetext.html>)

Dean supported Bush's request for \$87 billion to finance the continued occupation of Iraq. At the third Democratic presidential debate, Dean combined support for the "war on terrorism" with a call for "fiscal discipline" and higher taxes:

*Q: [Bush has asked for] \$87 billion for the ongoing war on terrorism. Your vote, yes or no, and if yes, how do you pay for \$87 billion?*

*DEAN: We have no choice, but it has to be financed by getting rid of all the president's tax cuts. Even though I did not support the war in the beginning, I think we have to support our troops. The \$87 billion ought to come from the excessive and extraordinary tax cuts that this president foisted upon us, that mainly went to people like Ken Lay who ran Enron. (Debate at Pace University in Lower Manhattan September 25, 2003; [www.issues2000.org/2004/Howard\\_Dean\\_War+\\_Peace.htm](http://www.issues2000.org/2004/Howard_Dean_War+_Peace.htm))*

## DEAN'S MAJOR PROBLEM WITH BUSH'S IRAQ WAR WAS THAT THE U.S. WAGED THIS WAR ALONE.

Dean is no antimilitarist. He supports increased U.S. military aid to the Israeli regime and the continued growth of U.S. military might. Dean believes that "The United States has to...take a much harder line on Iran and Saudi Arabia because they are funding terrorism." (Quoted in E.J. Kessler, "In Prexy Bid, Vt. Gov Taps AIPAC Vet Married to Jew, Courting Others," *Forward*, November 22, 2002, <http://www.forward.com/issues/2002/02.11.22/news3.html>).

The September 9, 2003 debate was especially instructive, not only about Howard Dean but the entire Democratic Party in regard to the Middle East. Dean responded to Lieberman's charge that he was insufficiently "pro-Israel" with a militant defense of the U.S.-Israel "special relationship." That kind of loyalty oath is demanded of every Democrat hoping to be nominated. ("At the Debate, Democrats Clash Over Mideast," *New York Times*, September 10, 2003)

Before running for president, Dean never raised a single objection to neoliberal economic policies from NAFTA to welfare reform. In an effort to win support from the labor leadership, Dean has recently called for FTAA to include "solid, enforceable labor standards." ([www.deanforamerica.com](http://www.deanforamerica.com))

Howard Dean



Bill Clinton made a similar pledge on NAFTA during his 1992 presidential campaign. Once in office, he pushed the agreement through Congress and later negotiated side agreements on labor and environmental standards. These "solid, enforceable labor standards" — adopted primarily to placate the unions and global justice advocates — have done nothing to stem the NAFTA-fueled "race to the bottom" in wages, working conditions and environmental degradation in North America during the last decade.

On social welfare Dean is a mainstream, Clinton-era "New Democrat." He consistently won praise from Vermont's business leaders for balancing the state budget, usually at the expense of working and poor people. Dean, in 1993, stated that welfare recipients "don't have any self-esteem. If they did, they'd be working."

In 1994, Dean unsuccessfully attempted to cut state benefits for the aged, blind and disabled. He was, however, able to impose draconian "workfare" requirements for the receipt of cash assistance. Dean was and is an enthusiastic supporter of Clinton's 1996 "welfare reform." (D. Blister, M. Estrin and R. Jacobs, "Howard Dean: The Progressive Anti-War Candidate? Some Vermonters Give Their Views," [www.counter-punch.org/jacobs08292002.html](http://www.counter-punch.org/jacobs08292002.html))

Dean promises to nationalize the "universal" health care program he established in Vermont. Truth is, Vermont does not have universal health care. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's September 2003 report, "Health Insurance Coverage in the United States, 2002," 9.6% of Vermont residents had no health insurance, compared with 14.7% nationally. (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p60-223.pdf>)

Nor will Dean's plan for national health insurance, if enacted, cover everyone:

*According to an analysis by The Lewin Group, a nationally respected health care consulting firm, at full implementation, the Dean plan, while available to all, would likely be taken up by 31 million of the 41 million Americans now uninsured, at an annual cost of \$88.3 billion.*  
([www.deanforamerica.com](http://www.deanforamerica.com))

Despite the recent endorsements of two of the largest unions, SEIU and AFSCME, Howard Dean is as much a "friend of labor" as Bill Clinton or Al Gore — who gave us NAFTA, the "end of welfare as we know it" and the debacle of "managed health care." Dean does have a reputation of being a progressive on "social issues," having

John Edwards



signed the first state legislation recognizing same-sex civil unions while Vermont governor. However, Dean repeatedly made clear his opposition to gay marriage and supported civil unions as a "lesser evil."

The evolution of Dean's position on the death penalty in the course of his presidential campaign foreshadows the evolution of his stance on other social issues. Alexander Cockburn presented a cogent analysis of Dean's trajectory in a recent essay:

*The death penalty? Yes, Dean evolved into a pro-death penalty position just when he was debating a White House run. For heinous crimes like killing kids or cops. Now, with his eye on the primary in South Carolina, he's added "terrorists" to those into whose arms he would stick the needle. Isn't that the posture of Ashcroft or of W. Bush, who signed more death warrants than any other governor in U.S. history? It is, but be reassured by the Dean campaign. In a Dean administration, those consigned to Death Row will know, even as the needle starts pumping poison into their veins, that President Dean went that last half mile to ensure fairness. ("Anybody but Bush? Watch out, Dems!" June 25, 2003. [www.workingforchange.com/printitem.cfm?itemid=15211](http://www.workingforchange.com/printitem.cfm?itemid=15211))*

Dean's comments about making the Democrats attractive to southern whites who fly the Confederate flag were spun with a dose of economic populism:

*There's no reason why white guys who have a Confederate flag in the back of their pickup truck shouldn't be walking side-by-side with blacks, because they don't have health insurance, either... ("Dean, Sharpton Stump in South Carolina," Associated Press, November 8, 2003. [www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/5179098.htm](http://www.thestate.com/mld/thestate/5179098.htm))*

Socialists and other radicals look forward to the day when white workers — north and south — stand with working people of color in a common struggle for economic and social justice. As white workers join with Black and Latino workers, however, they will cast aside their Confederate flags.

Senator John Edwards of North Carolina is running the most populist campaign of all the "centrist" Democrats in 2004. He not only constantly reminds voters of his working-class background (his rather was a textile mill worker), but he has consistently raised issues of economic justice from jobs to child poverty. At the Democratic debate on January 22, 2004, Edwards lambasted the rest of the Democratic candidates:



There has been no discussion about 35 million Americans who live in poverty. Millions of Americans who work fulltime for minimum wage and live in poverty. In a country of our wealth and prosperity, we have children going to bed hungry. We have children who don't have the clothes to keep them warm. The Democratic presidential candidates have a moral responsibility to talk about it and do something about it, because it is wrong. ("Democratic 2004 Primary Debate at St. Anselm College, January 22, 2004." [www.issues2000.org/2004/John-Edwards\\_Welfare+Poverty.htm](http://www.issues2000.org/2004/John-Edwards_Welfare+Poverty.htm))

Edwards has also stood outside the "New Democratic" mainstream on corporate "free trade." He voted against NAFTA and other bilateral and regional "free trade" agreements arguing that "trade deals without strong labor and environmental standards are bad for American workers and bad for workers overseas. These weak deals encourage a corporate 'race to the bottom' in which companies go to the countries that treat workers and the environment the worst." Edwards' support for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is conditional upon the incorporation of what he describes as "strong labor and environmental standards" and some "strong mechanism for enforcement of international labor standards." ("Fair Trade For America and the World, December 1, 2003." [www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id+398](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id+398))

Edwards' campaign has gained momentum after the North Carolina primary on February 3, 2004 — he is being discussed at the moment as a possible vice-presidential candidate. Not surprisingly, he has toned down his discussion of corporate "free trade." Edwards (unlike Kucinich) does not call for the repeal of NAFTA and barely mentions the FTAA on the campaign trail. His program for promoting job growth centers around tax incentives to corporations that continue to invest in the United States and calls for ending "currency manipulation" by China. ("Fair Trade For America and the World, December 1, 2003." [www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=398](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=398))

Despite his populist rhetoric, Edwards does not propose a massive expansion of social spending. His main proposal for urban poverty is his "Cities Rising" plan, whose centerpiece is more tax breaks to businesses that invest and create jobs in inner-city neighborhoods. The preservation of the Earned-Income Tax Credit for the lowest wage earners, small increases in the minimum wage (all below the rate of inflation), and reducing taxes on the working poor through increased child deductions and eliminating the marriage penalty round out his anti-poverty program. ("John Edwards Plan To Honor American Values And Expand The Middle Class By Lifting 10 Million Americans Out Of

Poverty, January 10, 2004." [www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=524](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=524))

Edwards is not an advocate of a universal, single-payer, health care. His proposal focuses on providing coverage for the millions of uninsured through \$25 billion in tax credits. The tax credits would allow working parents to deduct some of the cost of health insurance for themselves and their children from private insurers and employers. With the carrot of tax credits, however, comes the stick of "personal responsibility." Under the Edwards Plan, parents will get affordable credits and easy access to insurance. But parents will have a responsibility to cover their children. Parents who do not provide coverage will receive a warning, and parents who still do not cover their children will face a reduction in tax benefits equal to the cost. ("A Responsible Plan to Cover Every Child, Cut Costs for All, and Strengthen the Safety Net." [www.johnedwards2004.com/health-care-fact-sheet.asp?id=1&](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/health-care-fact-sheet.asp?id=1&))

Edwards' commitment, like most of the Democratic candidates, to "fiscal responsibility" — a balanced budget — may well undermine most of his milk-toast social program proposals. As Clinton discovered in his first term in the White House, it is impossible to deliver even the most minor

EDWARDS IS AN  
UNAPOLOGETIC  
SUPPORTER OF THE  
USA PATRIOT ACT.

expansion of social services and a balanced federal budget in a neoliberal world. Edwards, like other "New Democrats" is clear that "fiscal discipline is key to establishing an economic climate in which business can flourish." We can have little doubt that "fiscal discipline" will take precedence over even the most modest tax credits and social programs for working and poor people in an Edwards' administration.

Edwards is an unapologetic supporter of Bush's war and occupation of Iraq, and of the USA PATRIOT Act. Edwards voted "yes" on authorizing the use of military force against Iraq in October 2002 — as he had on the authorization of military force against Kosovo in March and May 1999. Edwards praised the U.S. military victory in Iraq "as a testament to the bipartisan commitment to ensuring that our military remains the best in the world; we removed a brutal regime and helped liberate a people." (Senator John Edwards, "Senate Statement on Postwar Iraq, May 20, 2003." [www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=104](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=104))

Like other "centrist" Democrats, he was unwilling to give the Bush administration an \$87 billion blank check for the

## SOME ISSUES OF DEMOCRACY

It is generally assumed that we live in a democratic country. While this is formally true, there is very little discussion about how our main form of "democracy" — elections — are in important respects profoundly undemocratic.

We cannot discuss these issues in detail here, but let's briefly summarize a few of the main limitations on electoral democracy in the United States:

1. Campaign Financing. Only those funded by the wealthy and by corporate America — or the very rich, who can fund their own campaigns — can run for major national office. Even ordinary Congressional races can now take tens of millions of dollars!

2. Media Access. In the 21st century, this is the main way candidates run, yet there is no access to the major corporate media except through ads or being considered a "major" (i.e. one of the two parties') candidate. This is not true of media access in other countries.

Actually, even prominent "major-party" candidates can become labelled as "marginal" if the networks choose. This was demonstrated in early December, when ABC simply withdrew its reporter assigned to the Dennis Kucinich campaign!

3. Registration Restrictions. State-by-state voter registration often limits people's ability to cast a ballot. Frequently it does not allow for homeless people to register. Very few states have same-day registration. In Florida, the Jeb Bush state administration

mysteriously "lost" the names of thousands of registered African-American voters.

In particular, the system disenfranchises anyone convicted of a felonious criminal offense. Again, this occurs on a state-by-state basis, but forty-six states and the District of Columbia deny the vote to adults convicted and in prison, thirty-two states deny it to felons on parole, twenty-nine to felons on probation, fourteen to ex-offenders.

Such laws can mean that in some states someone could be permanently disenfranchised if they receive probation for a single sale of drugs! Currently 3.9 million U.S. citizens are disenfranchised, including one million who have completed their sentence. This 3.9 million includes 1.4 million African Americans (in two states, almost one out of every three African-American men are disenfranchised; in eight other states, one in four).

Even where someone can get their voting rights back, they generally have to petition to do so; they are not automatically returned.

In Florida's 2000 election ripoff, a private firm hired by the state removed the names of voters — mainly Black — whose names were falsely identified as felons.

But why take voting rights away from criminal offenders? In many other countries prisoners vote, unless their convictions have to do with vote fraud. Cutting prisoners off from their civil rights

is in no way necessary, and permanent disbarment limits the ability of felons to be reintegrated once out of prison.

All this can be found in information on the Sentencing Project website. (See <http://www.sentencingproject.org> for a 29-page report by The Sentencing Project & Human Rights Project from October 1998, "Losing the Vote, The Impact of Felony Discrimination in the US.")

4. Wasted Votes. In the absence of Instant Runoff Voting and Proportional Representation, the electoral structure marginalizes third-party or independent candidates as "spoilers." Allowing minority positions representation in state and national legislatures — in place of the "winner take all" district setup — by means of proportional representation, would produce representative institutions much closer to the views of the population.

Such a system would increase people's motivation to vote — as opposed to today, where most people live in districts where the victory of one or the other party is assured. It would also eliminate the incentive for blatant gerrymandering of Congressional districts that we're currently seeing in Texas and Pennsylvania, for example.

Importantly, such election procedures exist in most other countries! (See the Center for Voting & Democracy website, [www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org) for information.)

occupation of Iraq. However, Edwards does not support the right of the Iraqis to determine their future without outside interference from the U.S. or other imperial powers. His criticizes the Bush administration for failing to meet its "enormous responsibility; to the Iraqi people [to] rebuild their lives in peace and prosperity." (*Senator John Edwards, "Senate Statement on Postwar Iraq, May 20, 2003."* [www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=104](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=104)) Like Dean, he advocates a multilateral imperial occupation of Iraq. Edwards calls on the UN and NATO to help establish "a

free Iraqi government," and for the creation of a "NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force." ("*Senator Edwards Charts Path From Chaos to Secure and Independent Iraq, May 20, 2003.*" [www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=104](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/page.asp?id=104))

Edwards also voted for the USA PATRIOT Act in the immediate aftermath of September 11th. In an interview with the liberal (and ostensibly anti-PATRIOT Act) "Moveon.org," Edwards explained that he "supported the PATRIOT Act because it contained provisions needed to

strengthen our security, but I also believe this administration has abused its powers in implementing the law." (*Candidate Interview with John Edwards, June 17, 2003.* [www.moveon.org/pac/cands/edwards.html](http://www.moveon.org/pac/cands/edwards.html)). Specifically, Edwards is critical of the Bush administration's use of the law, to label U.S. citizens "enemy combatants" and hold them without charges, access to lawyers and other due process rights. He is silent on the round ups of immigrants from Arab and Muslim countries, while favoring strengthening cooperation between the CIA and FBI in "uncovering terrorist threats before they cause harm." (*John Edwards' Plan to Strengthen Domestic Defense.* [www.johnedwards2004.com/security.asp?l=1](http://www.johnedwards2004.com/security.asp?l=1))

Edwards' tepid populism, which combines mild social welfare and economic regulation with support for U.S. imperial military might, faintly echoes the "guns and butter" politics of the Democratic party in the 1960s. But the global economic turbulence of the past thirty years makes a return to the welfare policies of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations a pipe dream. U.S. transnationals, which every "serious" and "electable" Democrat must placate, demand "free trade," fiscal austerity and social deregulation to compete with European and Japanese transnationals.

## The "New Democratic" Right: Kerry

**John Kerry appears to be the preferred** candidate of the Democratic Leadership Council that assumed leadership in the Democratic Party in the late 1980s and early '90s. (Dean and Edwards are also well within the "New Democratic" mainstream of the party, but are not formally associated with DLC.)

Kerry, a former leader of Vietnam Veterans against the War, has recently denounced the Bush administration for "misleading Congress" with its bald-faced lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in the lead-up to the war. But Kerry's antiwar past did not prevent him from voting for both the USA PATRIOT Act and the congressional resolution authorizing the invasion of Iraq.

Kerry trumpeted nearly all of the Bush administration's lies about Iraq to whip up support for war. Saddam Hussein was "attempting to develop nuclear weapons." "All U.S. intelligence experts agree that Iraq is seeking nuclear weapons." "Iraq has chemical and biological weapons." Iraq's weapons programs "are larger and more advanced than they were before the Gulf War." Invasion was required because "these weapons represent an unacceptable threat."



John Kerry

"Iraq is developing unmanned aerial vehicles capable of delivering chemical and biological warfare agents, which could threaten Iraq's neighbors as well as American forces in the Persian Gulf."

[Quotes from S. Zunes, "Kerry's Deceptions on Iraq Threaten His Presidential Hopes," August 26, 2003, <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0826-03.htm>]

Speaking to a liberal antiwar audience at the "Take Back America" conference in Washington, DC organized by the Campaign for America's Future (a coalition of the AFL-CIO, NOW and other mainstream liberal groups in the Democratic Party) on June 5, 2003, Kerry made clear that he was a resolute defender of U.S. empire:

*I say to you unabashedly that I come to you as a Democrat who is unprepared to allow those who reflexively oppose any U.S. military intervention anywhere or who see U.S. power as mostly a malignant force in the world, or who place a higher value on achieving multilateral consensus than necessarily protecting vital interests of our nation. Americans deserve better than the false choice given by this administration between force without diplomacy and diplomacy without force. I believe they deserve a principled diplomacy backed by our undoubted military might, based on enlightened self-interest, not the zero-sum logic of power politics.*  
([www.ourfuture.org/docUploads/kerry.pdf](http://www.ourfuture.org/docUploads/kerry.pdf))

Kerry's refusal to make even the most modest concessions to the antiwar sensibilities of his audience again illustrates the limits of the "lesser evil." Kerry understands that pro-Democratic Party progressives have nowhere to go, and their demands can be easily ignored.

Kerry made his pro-imperial politics clear during the second Democratic presidential candidates debate. He indicated his initial intention to vote for the additional \$87 billion Bush requested to fund the occupation of Iraq, arguing that "I will do what we need to do to protect the troops." He also defended his support for the Congressional resolution giving Bush a blank check for the invasion of Iraq: "I voted to authorize. It was the right vote... We had to give life to the threat. If there wasn't a legitimate threat, Saddam Hussein was not going to allow inspectors in." (*Full Transcript: Democratic Presidential Candidates Debate,* FDCH E-Media, September 9, 2003, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-serv/politics/transcripts/090903\\_debatetext.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-serv/politics/transcripts/090903_debatetext.html))

While Kerry did vote against the \$87 billion in Congress, he did so to "hold the President accountable and force

## KERRY IS FIRMLY COMMITTED TO A NEOLIBERAL, CORPORATE AGENDA IN "TRADE POLICY."

him to develop a real plan that secures the safety of our troops and stabilizes Iraq." For Kerry, only a multilateral occupation force under a UN civil authority can guarantee the stabilization of Iraq in the interests of world and U.S. capitalism:

*The best way to support the troops, is get the international community in to help us, so we can have other troops on the ground share the burden and share the risks....I'm prepared to spend money; I'm prepared to spend whatever it takes to be successful in Iraq. But I want to spend the money smart...You've got to go with the UN completely... a real transfer of authority to the UN for the civil development, for the governances, and for the humanitarian programs. Then it's possible to have a broader, multination force come onto the ground, relieve the pressure from the American force, reduce the sense of American occupation and take the target off of American soldiers. Once you do both of those things, you can train the Iraqi military and police faster, and you can set a date for the transfer of full authority for Iraq back to the Iraqis. If all of that were done simultaneously, you've have a much faster transfer of authority in Iraq and you'd make the ground much safer for American forces, and you begin to reduce the number of American forces who are overcommitted and overextended...." (www.johnkerry.com/iraq\_vote.html)*

Kerry's plan — like Dean's — supports neither the right of the Iraqi people to determine their own future nor the growing demands of U.S. military families and veterans' organizations to bring the troops home immediately.

Kerry's economic and social program is nearly identical to Dean's and the other "New Democratic" advocates of corporate globalization. At the September 4, 2003 Democratic candidates' debate, Kerry joined the other Democratic candidates in expressing reservations about the FTAA's lack of environmental and labor standards. Like most Democratic candidates, he is willing to make this meaningless concession to secure the support of the labor officialdom for his candidacy.

Kerry, however, is firmly committed to a neoliberal, corporate agenda in "trade policy." At the September 4 debate, Kerry attacked Kucinich for calling for the United States to withdraw from the anti-worker NAFTA and WTO:

*I am as strongly committed as Kucinich is to worker rights, but it would be disastrous to just cancel NAFTA and withdraw from the WTO. You have to fix it. You have to have a*

*president who understands how to use the power that we have as the world's biggest marketplace to properly leverage the kind of behavior that we want. You also have to have a president who is prepared to have an enforcement structure through the powers of the various sections of the trade agreement. (Democratic Primary Debate, Albuquerque, New Mexico September 4, 2003. [www.issues2000.org/2004/John\\_Kerry\\_Free\\_Trade.htm](http://www.issues2000.org/2004/John_Kerry_Free_Trade.htm))*

The logic of "the lesser evil" requires supporting whomever the Democrats nominate — even if that nominee supports major elements of Bush's program. The lesser-evil imperative compels radicals and progressives to ignore the glaring similarities between Bush and candidates like Dean, Edwards or Kerry, and elevate secondary differences into major distinctions.

Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), a leading House liberal, embraced this political logic in her speech to the "Take Back America" conference in June 2003, that drew more than 2,000 activists from mainstream labor, women's, LGBT, peace and civil rights organizations. After laying out Bush's agenda and calling on progressive forces to keep up the struggle, she told those attending:

*Like it or not, either George W. Bush or the Democratic nominee, whoever he may be, will be our next president. We should, by all means, be working to promote a progressive agenda with each and every candidate and to make the nominee as progressive as possible. But in the end, we are going to have to dedicate ourselves to electing the Democrat. To do otherwise is a luxury we cannot afford. I look forward to our campaign for a universal health care plan or a real education bill or labor law reform. We cannot even have that conversation now. We are trying to hang on by our fingernails to what we have now. And we are losing. (<http://cms.ourfuture.org/media/Schakowsky.ram>)*

Not "supporting the Democrat," according to Schakowsky, "is simply a luxury we cannot afford." We believe, on the contrary, that supporting Democrats is the "luxury we cannot afford." Activists in the antiwar, global justice, labor and other social movements need to spurn the siren song of "the lesser evil" in 2004.

Time and again in the 20th century, promising social movements — like the antiwar upsurge of the past year — lost momentum as they sought to elect less reactionary Democrats to office in the hope of stopping more reactionary Republicans. The social movements declined and the opportunity for developing a radical alternative politics slipped away. Time and again, supporting "the lesser evil" only facilitated a rightward lurch in U.S. politics.

# • • • THE LEFT & THE DEMOCRATS

The debate about "lesser evilism" is often caught between two opposing positions. On the one hand, some claim that whatever the common agenda of the U.S. corporate elite, which both the Democrats and Republicans represent, there are nevertheless important differences between the two political parties. These differences require leftists to work for the election of one over the other.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that because of the common agenda of the U.S. corporate elite, which both the Democrats and Republicans represent, there is no significant difference between the two parties. The essential similarity between the two parties requires leftists to work for neither the Democratic nor Republican candidate.

Both of these positions are one-sided. If there were really no difference, or no significant difference, between the Democrats and Republicans then that would quickly become obvious, and it would be very difficult to convince anyone to vote for one candidate over another.

To be sure, the fact that roughly half of the eligible voters sit out presidential elections, and nearly two-thirds absent themselves from Congressional, state and local elections suggests the two parties are having increasing difficulty convincing large numbers of people that there are significant differences!

There are differences, nonetheless, over questions about appointing federal judges; abortion rights; how much to partner with other capitalist powers in assuring corporate domination of the world militarily and politically; what sort of pro-corporate tax and spending policies should be pursued; how hard, how fast, and how far to push in dismantling social programs, affirmative action, etc. All these do represent real differences between the major parties, and even among individual candidates within those parties.

At the same time all of these real differences — with the possible exception of abortion rights, where the pressure of a massive pro-choice movement has sharply limited the Democrats' option to capitulate to the hard right — fall into the category of secondary questions, especially small when compared to those programmatic elements on which the two parties agree.

That bipartisan agreement includes: that tax policies should promote profitability; that welfare, affirmative action and economic regulation need to be scaled back or dismantled; that U.S. military dominance must be maintained. When we vote for either a Democrat or a Republican for president we are voting for a continuation of the political priorities of the capitalist class.

Within the two-party system continued rule by political, economic and military elites remains unquestioned — only the policies designed to maintain that rule. We need to ask ourselves: What do we achieve if the "lesser evil" candidate wins? What do we lose? How do we balance these gains and losses against each other?

Perhaps most important, what would be required for the emergence of a genuine political alternative that will actually promote a tax policy that favors working people over the rich, expands social programs and affirmative action, and opposes military spending and wars abroad? If we examine the problem in a bit more depth, we will get some helpful insights.

## Where Do the Differences Come From?

The differences that do really exist between Democratic and Republican politicians come from two sources. First, there are genuine disagreements among corporate rulers about what is in their best interests. The two most pressing questions that divide some Democrats and Republicans in 2004 revolve around tax and foreign policy.

Will tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy stimulate investment and the "trickling down" of jobs and income? Or will these tax cuts merely fuel larger federal deficits and spark inflation?

Should the United States move ahead unilaterally to impose its worldwide military dominance regardless of the desires of the European and Japanese capitalists and their governments? Or is multilateral military intervention, with the approval of the UN or NATO, less dangerous than U.S. unilateralism?

In different times and situations, either party will advocate one approach or another — there are no principles to sacrifice.

Working people and oppressed communities have a real stake in what answers are given to such questions by

## WHAT DO WE ACHIEVE IF THE "LESSER EVIL" CANDIDATE WINS?

Congress and the White House. On the surface this would appear to add credibility to the "lesser evil" argument that we should vote for candidates who advocate a more moderate fiscal and foreign policy.

This conclusion is wrong. It incorrectly assumes that elections really determine what kinds of policies are carried out. It also ignores a second, and far more important, source of disagreement among Democratic and Republican politicians: different sensibilities regarding what corporate America can actually get away with before it faces a fightback from working people.

Here there is no disagreement about what would be desirable: Every cutback in social programs, every successful attack on the ability of unions to organize, every time inequality between men and women or between whites and people of color is sustained or expanded, Corporate America is the winner. The direct result is an increased ability to generate profits and to keep them in corporate pockets.

The answer to the question "what can corporate America get away with?" depends primarily on how much of an active fightback and resistance is likely to take place. It is on questions such as this that the left most immediately and acutely sacrifices its ability to make progress, or sustain historical gains, when we give our votes to a "lesser evil" candidate.

Inevitably, when activists get involved in delivering progressive voters to the lesser-evil Democrat, the work of building independent movements of struggle is derailed. And yet it is the real movements of resistance, not what happens at the ballot box, that hamper the ability of all corporate politicians to implement their agenda.

## How We Got To Where We Are Today

We will probably all agree that at the dawn of the 21st century political discourse in most respects is more reactionary than at any time in the past two generations. (The exceptions are a tribute to mass struggles, the civil rights movement that smashed the legitimacy of open racism, the women's movement that demanded the right of women to make the basic decisions about their bodies and lives and the LGBT movement that demolished legally entrenched homophobia.)

If we look back to the late 1960s and early 1970s the contrast is stark indeed. Richard Nixon's social policies

were miles to the left of those carried out by Clinton, whom the right and the media effectively labeled as a "liberal."

In the first half of the 1970s we got troops out of Vietnam, more democratic access to government files with the Freedom of Information Act, and the formal dismantling of COINTELPRO (the FBI's program of surveillance and disruption of antiwar and African-American organizations that began under the Democratic Johnson administration). Now we get the "war on terror," unregulated detentions of immigrants, military courts, and the USA PATRIOT Act.

In the 1970s there was an expansion of affirmative action programs for women and minorities. Today affirmative action is rolled back everywhere. In the 1970s the federal government created social programs that, to a limited extent, redistributed income, and increased regulation of workplace safety and of environmental pollution. Today we get the dismantling of the vestiges of the meager U.S. welfare state and the rule of the "free market" over more and more aspects of our lives.

The difference, of course, is that during the 1960s and early 1970s there was a dramatic upsurge of social struggles. Beginning with the civil rights rebellion in the South, continuing with the anti-Vietnam war movement, and then with the new wave of feminist struggles, the rise of the gay liberation movement, and a wave of official and unofficial strikes that shook U.S. manufacturing, mass struggles shifted the center of political life to the left.

One thing that followed during the late 1970s and 1980s in particular was the siphoning off of the energy of these movements into more "mainstream" forms of electoral politics. Instead of mass movements that disrupted "business as usual" helping to set the political agenda, the concerns of Democratic and Republican politicians and their corporate supporters increasingly shaped political discourse.

At first there were politicians who occupied some of the political space that had been opened up by mass struggles. Many came to believe that these politicians had actually created the political space they occupied. The reality was quite different: Mass struggles created the political space and the politicians had moved into it.

As the mass movements faded — often at the behest of these same politicians, who urged activists to get involved in "politics" rather than merely in "protest" — the spaces got smaller and smaller. The politicians who had occupied the space created by the social movements shrank in num-

ber and moved to the right. Nevertheless, the leaders of the unions and social movements, in thousands of non-presidential elections, have enthusiastically backed Democrats without fail.

The result? In each election, the Democratic "lesser evil" is secure in her or his support from progressives, labor and oppressed minorities. The Democrats have no reason at all to give progressives or labor or minority communities anything — either in campaign promises or much less in policies once elected.

Instead, all the concessions have been made to the right, in order to win the support of corporate funders and more conservative, mainly white middle-income voters. With each election the center shifted, as the Democrats know that no matter what, progressives, labor and racial minorities have "no place to go." Little by little, we have arrived at the point where "liberal" is now a dirty word and the need for social welfare is dismissed as something of concern only to "special interests."

In some situations, the fruits are even more rotten. Democrats, including liberals, often elected with the support of labor, civil rights and other progressive constituencies, have implemented austerity and administered growing unemployment and declining living standards at the local, state and federal level. The frustration many working and oppressed people legitimately feel toward the Democrats is easily captured by the right.

This dynamic has been played out in California as we write. The failure of "New Democratic" Governor Gray Davis provided a fertile environment for the growth of the Republican right, which successfully pushed for a recall election. While some of the left backed an independent, Green candidate for governor; the support of the unions and minority organizations for Davis and the Democrats left those alienated by the Davis administration's bankruptcy open to appeals from Schwarzenegger and other Republicans. In California, the "Terminator" in the governor's mansion is the fruit of lesser-evilism.

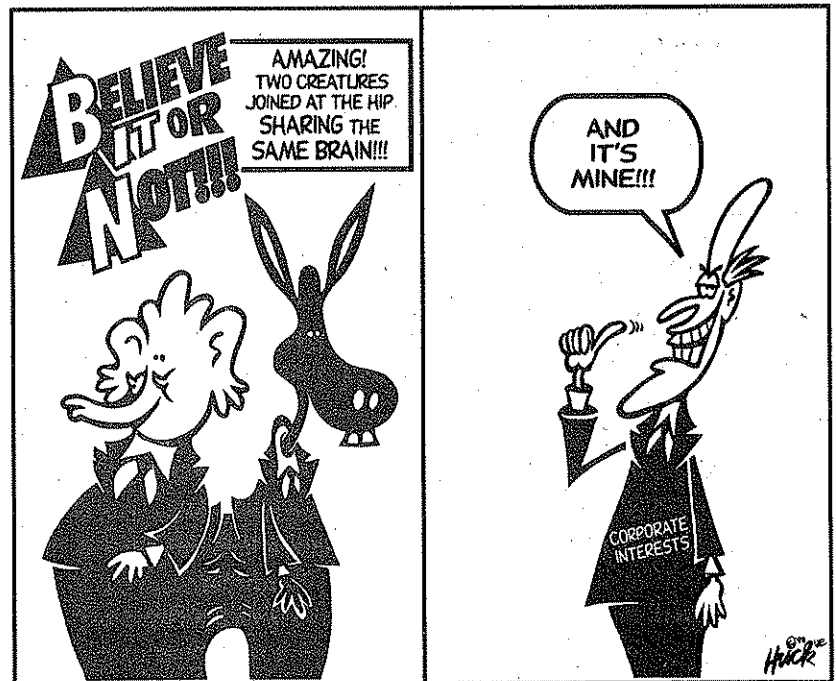
This political dynamic is obscene, of course. But the deeper tragedy is the way in which many on the left have allowed themselves to become trapped within it. When Richard Nixon was in office many leftists argued that he was the worst thing to ever happen in this country and had to be defeated at all costs. Then, when Ronald Reagan was in office they said the same thing. We heard the same arguments with Bush Sr., and now again with Bush Jr.

No question, each Republican president has been worse than the one before. But the same thing can be said of the "lesser evil" Democratic candidates and elected officials. This pattern is not accidental, and we need to learn something from the experience. None of this will change until we try a different approach.

## False Assumptions

The lesser-evil strategy assumes that government policies are the result of elections. This assumption is simply incorrect. Yet it is often a matter of indifference (or only of marginal importance) to most within the corporate elite which party wins the election. They have many other means at their disposal to make sure the government carries out policies that are in their interests.

The programmatic differences between the two major parties, for the most part, are not significant enough to matter greatly to them. It is even common for big corporations, or rich individuals, to give money to both the Democratic and Republican candidates in order to have a finger in the pie no matter who is elected.



Commitments to the rest of us are another matter. When was the last time any president, or congressperson, or governor fulfilled their promises to working people once in office? There is always a fiscal crisis, a terrorist attack, or simply "practical politics" that dictates the limits of what can be done "within the system." The reality is that even the best-intentioned politicians, if they do not break from

# ● ● ● THE DEMOCRATS & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

"politics as usual," will be trapped in a web of obligations from which they cannot escape.

At times, to be sure, the bosses are in sharp disagreement with one candidate. For example, during the 1964 election when Barry Goldwater was deemed too dangerous and provocative a right-winger, Lyndon Johnson received overwhelming corporate support. Similarly, when George McGovern won the Democratic nomination in 1972 and was deemed too liberal, the majority of corporate support went to Richard Nixon.

Today, George W. Bush's policies are substantially to the right of Goldwater's. Yet the corporate ruling class is perfectly comfortable with Bush in the White House. The difference is the political moment. The corporate ruling class does not fear that a right-wing agenda will stimulate an unacceptable resistance from working people and the oppressed.

If our desire is to get Bush and everything he represents — the religious right zealots, the neocons, the militarists, the environmental rapists — out of the White House, then we need to make it too risky and costly for the U.S. ruling class to keep him there. Our main task is to turn up the heat through social protest and resistance.

U.S. elites have little to fear from popular anger at Bush's policies, so long as the main expression of dissent is electing a more moderate party of pro-corporate politicians. They will have little or no reason to stop supporting Bush with their campaign dollars and favorable coverage in the media, which they control.

Campaigning, fundraising, defending and voting for Democrats will not raise the social costs of keeping Bush in the White House. As many activists are drawn into Democratic electoral work, energy, time and money will drain away from the real source of our power.

What is more important to organize: a campus teach-in on Iraq, or a tea party for Dean? A die-in at Caterpillar to protest Israeli home demolitions, or a fancy dinner for Kerry? A house party for the Green candidate, where radical anti-corporate politics can be raised and debated, or an e-mailed fundraiser for Edwards? A showing to co-workers of "Shots on the Docks" — a video on the Oakland police attacks on longshore workers and antiwar protesters in April 2003 — or passing out slick photographs of Kerry? Developing a local speakers' bureau on the war, or developing rhetorical tricks to explain away the Democrats' support for occupying Iraq?

From the industrial workers' movements of the 1930s through the civil rights and Black Power struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, to the anti-Vietnam War movement and the movements against "Reaganism" in the 1980s, the historical record in the United States demonstrates a consistent pattern. Social movements decline, even disappear, once key leaders decide to "be practical," subordinate mass militant struggles and get involved in traditional, Democratic electoral politics.

## The Democrats and the Decline of the CIO

The CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), the industrial union federation, was born in struggle. Since the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, unemployment, wage cuts and speedup had beaten workers down. By the early 1930s, radicals, socialists and communists had laid a foundation that led to the organization of the unemployed.

The unemployed workers' movements engaged in mass demonstrations, sit-ins at relief offices and direct actions to resist evictions. Despite facing severe repression from local police and municipal governments (often with Democratic mayors), the unemployed movement won important gains and provided many workers with the experience that they could fight and win.

Many veterans of the unemployed movement, as they returned to work, together with radicals, socialists and communists who were in the big industrial workplaces, began to organize industrial unions. In 1934 a series of radical-led mass strikes — among Teamsters in Minneapolis, auto workers in Toledo, and dock workers in San Francisco — showed working people that they could win.

In each of these strikes the keys to victory were united struggle, the organization of democratic, rank-and-file run unions, reliance on their own power in the streets rather than politicians or government mediators, and building alliances with the unemployed and farmers.

The success of the 1934 strikes sparked a debate in the old American Federation of Labor (AFL), whose unions were divided along craft lines. Rank-and-file organizers in the



auto, rubber, steel, machine making, and other mass production industries, along with leaders of the miners' and clothing workers' unions, argued for industrial unionism that united everyone working in a particular industry regardless of their job or position.

While this strategy was rejected by the AFL, the CIO launched a series of organizing drives. Industrial unionism's ultimate test was the sit-down strike against General Motors in Flint, Michigan in 1936-37. The victory of the United Automobile Workers in Flint encouraged a wave of sit-downs in other industries and was decisive in the establishment of the CIO unions.

The emergence and victory of the CIO owed little to who was in the White House. Franklin Roosevelt, the first Democrat to win the presidency in twenty years, had been elected on a rather conservative program of balancing the federal budget to restore business confidence.

While unrest among the unemployed led Roosevelt to launch some public works programs in 1933 and 1934, the "first New Deal" did little to redistribute income or promote worker organization. The primary goal of the National Industrial Recovery Act, which was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, was to limit what Roosevelt deemed "destructive competition" among manufacturers by setting prices and production quotas.

The famous Section 7A, which recognized the right of workers to form unions of their own choosing, had no mechanisms for enforcement against recalcitrant employers. Rather than being granted the "right to organize" through legislation, the CIO unions seized this "right" through mass, direct action. The Roosevelt administration's policies moved in a more reform-oriented direction only in 1935 — after the strikes in Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco — and in the midst of a continued strike wave.

The "second New Deal" marked a sharp shift to the left on the part of Roosevelt and the Democrats. The passage of the Social Security Act (which established unemployment insurance, pensions and cash relief for widows with children), the Fair Labor Standards Act (which established the forty-hour week and the minimum wage) and the National Labor Relations Act (which established legal mechanisms for union recognition) were all responses to the wave of strikes that shook U.S. industry between 1934 and 1937.

Roosevelt and the Democrats responded to industrial unrest with reforms. But in order to maintain the support of two key constituencies — the northern Democratic machines that represented urban real estate developers,

and the segregationist southern Democrats ("Dixiecrats") who represented large planters — the New Deal reforms contained important limitations.

State governments would administer unemployment insurance and cash aid to single mothers (Aid for Dependent Children — AFDC) to insure local employers' need for cheap labor. Even more importantly, agricultural and domestic workers — who were overwhelmingly African Americans and other people of color — were excluded from the unemployment insurance, old age pensions, and the legal right to unionize.

The power and radicalism of the activism from rank-and-file workers that fueled the CIO upsurge not only frightened the corporate bosses and the Roosevelt administration, but a segment of the AFL officialdom as well. Led by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, dissident industrial union bureaucrats attempted to divert the CIO upsurge from militant direct action to more routine forms of bargaining and reliance on federal mediation.

In the wake of the GM sitdown, the new CIO bureaucracy was able to stop the spread of sitdown strikes to Chrysler and other auto manufacturers and established top-down control over the ultimately unsuccessful organizing at the "Little Steel" companies in 1937. A central element of the new CIO officialdom's program for taming industrial worker militancy was an alliance with the Democrats and the Roosevelt administration.

The role of most Democratic Party politicians — including many governors and mayors — in assisting the bosses and attempting to thwart the unions in their organizing campaigns gave rise to a fierce discussion within the CIO about whether a Labor Party should be formed. Many resolutions calling for an independent party based in the new industrial unions were passed by locals of CIO unions, and even at international conventions of the United Auto Workers.

The allegiance of the CIO leaders to Roosevelt and the Democrats, however, quashed any serious discussion of an independent party that could present the views of working people in the electoral arena. Labor's support for Roosevelt in the closely contested 1936 election was crucial to his reelection.

The Democrats repaid the CIO leadership in 1937 when the Democratic mayor of Chicago dispatched the police to shoot unarmed "Little Steel" strikers at a Memorial Day picnic. Roosevelt's response was to call down a "plague on both your houses" — both the steel corporations and the unions.

Labor's alliance with the Democrats, combined with a desire not to appear "unpatriotic," led both the AFL and CIO leaders to give up the right to strike during the Second World War. With the help of the Roosevelt administration, the labor officials stamped out the tradition of "quickie" strikes over shop-floor issues and imposed the bureaucratic grievance procedure to adjudicate workplace conflicts.

## THE AFL-CIO'S ANTAGONISM TOWARD THE CIVIL RIGHTS, WOMEN'S & ANTIWAR MOVEMENTS ISOLATED IT FROM IMPORTANT POTENTIAL ALLIES.

By the end of the war, the CIO unions had been housebroken. The officials tightly controlled the post-war strike wave, and inflation quickly wiped out the wage gains won during the strikes.

The corporations were so confident after the war that they successfully pushed through the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which placed legal obstacles in the way of union organizing (especially in the south) and gave the federal government the right to stop nationwide strikes.

Despite the crucial role the unions played, once again, in electing Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, and a Democratic majority in Congress in 1948, the Democrats have never repealed the Taft-Hartley Act.

In pursuit of its alliance with the Democratic Party, the AFL-CIO leadership adapted its politics to the corporate interests that dominated the Democrats throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The unions accepted the corporate argument that overseas investment and trade were essential to economic expansion and continued prosperity for U.S. workers.

As a result, most of the AFL-CIO leadership supported the "cold war" interventionist foreign policy of the Democrats, and assisted CIA efforts to undermine militant labor movements as well as left leaning governments in the Third World. The AFL-CIO also abandoned its demands for national health insurance and public housing, and adapted to conservative pressures from the Democrats.

When the civil rights movement began to challenge the American version of apartheid in the South, the AFL-CIO refused to challenge the racist Dixiecrats. The AFL-CIO did

not support the 1963 March on Washington organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. and removed A. Philip Randolph from its Executive Board for criticizing its inaction.

The AFL-CIO bureaucracy's policy was ultimately self-defeating. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the size of the unions and their alliance with the Democratic Party masked the fundamental weakness of the labor movement. So long as profits were high and employers granted wage increases — in exchange for unions giving up any attempt to control the pace and nature of work — the unions seemed to be doing all right. But when the U.S. and global capitalist economy entered a prolonged crisis in the late 1960s and the corporate employers began to attack the unions, labor's weaknesses became apparent.

The AFL-CIO's antagonism toward the civil rights, women's and antiwar movements isolated it from important potential allies, while its continued reliance on the Democrats served as a substitute for militant action against the employers and their government. The bureaucratic unions allied to the Democrats were unable to respond to the turn of politicians in both parties to fiscal restraint and deregulation, and by major corporations to new methods of "lean production" during the mid-1970s.

The "barren marriage" of labor and the Democrats has produced a union movement that has declined from nearly 35% of the workforce in the 1960s, to less than 15% today. The rightward moving Democrats know that they have little or no reason to make any significant concessions to the labor movement. The AFL-CIO has no place to go electorally besides the Democrats and has neglected workplace and social militancy as a means of building power for working people for decades.

## The African-American Struggle

At the beginning of the 20th century nearly three-quarters of African Americans lived in the rural South, working as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or domestics. White supremacy, based on the Southern plantation system, was codified in the legal and social practices of segregation and disenfranchisement. The reorganization of Southern agriculture and the growth of Northern industry in the early 20th century opened the road both to massive Black migration and to a challenge to the brutal Jim Crow system.

Between 1915 and 1920 a million African Americans migrated to the urban North; tens of thousands more moved to cities in the South or West. Another million

rural Black people migrated to cities during the 1920s. Despite the discrimination African Americans faced in the Northern urban centers, they were able to create a community, build their own organizations, and begin to confront discrimination and segregation.

The Depression of the early 1930s cut migration to a trickle, as Black workers were laid off in disproportionate numbers. During the 1930s, however, Black workers joined interracial unemployed organizations and, with the founding of the CIO, joined unions that actively sought to include them.

The Great Migration resumed during World War II, as the expansion of war industry created millions of new jobs, practically eliminating unemployment in the Northern manufacturing centers. Most industries initially refused to hire Blacks. By 1944, despite widespread discrimination on the job, African Americans made up more than eight percent of the workers in war production.

At the beginning of the war A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters initiated a "Double V" campaign: victory against fascism abroad and victory against racism at home. Faced with pressure from civil rights organizations and the CIO unions, Roosevelt banned racial discrimination in the defense industry and federal government employment.

African Americans continued to face racist resistance. During the summer of 1943 alone there were 250 anti-Black race riots in forty-seven cities. There were also a wave of "hate strikes" — when white workers walked off jobs to oppose the hiring or promotion of African Americans in traditionally "white" jobs in the war economy.

Three million African-American men and women served in the armed forces (segregated into all-Black units, commanded by often racist white officers and military police), with half serving overseas. Black officers and enlisted personnel fought against the Jim Crow in the military. In response, the federal government began to take small steps toward desegregation.

Once a legal order was issued, African-American soldiers fought to make it a reality. Lt. Jackie Robinson — who would break the color line in major league baseball after the war — refused to sit in the back of a bus in Texas after the War Department issued a directive in 1944 against discrimination in transportation and recreational facilities on all military bases. Arrested and court-martialed, Robinson was vindicated. His is but one of many cases.

Throughout the war, the African-American community fought segregation and disenfranchisement through both direct actions and legal means. NAACP chapters carried out local mass action opposing restrictive covenants (Chicago), discrimination at lunch counters (Newton, Kansas) and segregated theaters (Council Bluffs, Iowa). They carried out voter registration (Roosevelt, Alabama) and staged the country's first lunch counter sit-ins (Topeka, Kansas).

The chapters were aided by NAACP Field Director Ella Baker, who, after she became Director of Branches in 1943, set up ten leadership training conferences for activists in the Black community.

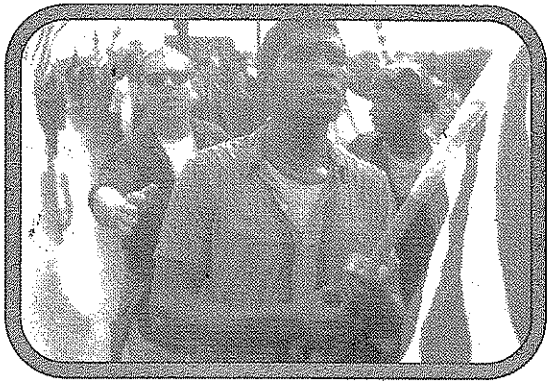
In 1946, in the aftermath of the massive postwar strike wave, the CIO launched "Operation Dixie" — an ambitious campaign to organize unions in the South. "Operation Dixie," to be successful, would have had to confront Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchisement as the precondition for uniting Black and white workers in industrial unions in the South.

Such a labor-led civil rights movement would have put the CIO on a collision course with the Democratic Party, which relied on the support of Southern landowners and the disenfranchisement of African Americans for the party's regional and national political supremacy. The CIO officials, however, feared the prospect of confrontation with the Democratic "friends of labor," with whom they also sought to join in the anti-communist Cold War crusade. As a result, they abandoned "Operation Dixie."

The failure of "Operation Dixie" did not spell the end of the African-American community's struggle against the Jim Crow system. The declining importance of the Southern landowning classes — the main social base of support for legal segregation and disenfranchisement — opened the possibility of successful struggle against white supremacy in the South.

The social transformation of the Southern African-American communities — with a growing urban working and middle class in the South, and the experiences of many Blacks returning from the war or from working in the Northern cities — set the stage for the emergence of the mass civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

This movement rooted itself in local struggles that forced the entrenched Southern power structure to abandon legal segregation and disenfranchisement. It was a movement that had the power to force the federal government — whether Republicans or Democrats were in office — to act against Jim Crow, despite the vacillation of both parties.



## Marching in Montgomery

By the spring of 1951, students at a Black high school in Farmville, Virginia protested their inadequate

conditions and, led by Barbara Johns, went out on strike. The spirited 16-year-old sent off an appeal to NAACP lawyers, who agreed to come to Farmville for a meeting — not realizing it was “the children” who had initiated the contact.

The lawyers explained that they had no mandate to sue for better Black schools, only for integrated ones. At a mass meeting the community — overwhelmed by students' audacity — voted to proceed with a federal suit challenging “separate but equal” schools. Their case, plus four others (from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina and the District of Columbia), became part of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. On May 17, 1954 the Court ruled racial segregation of public schools unconstitutional.

In December 1955, following the arrest of Montgomery, Alabama NAACP activist Rosa Parks for failing to give up her seat to a white passenger, a one-day bus boycott was called for the day of Parks' trial. The Women's Political Council, led by JoAnn Robinson, initiated the boycott and distributed more than 52,000 leaflets throughout Montgomery's Black community.

The buses rolled through the city empty, and several thousand came together that evening for a rally that formed the Montgomery Improvement Association. What was planned as a one-day boycott lasted 381 days and involved 42,000 protesters, who walked or car pooled until the U.S. Federal District Court ruled in favor of the NAACP's legal challenge to overturn segregated seating in public transportation.

Although Montgomery wasn't the first successful bus boycott, for Ella Baker of the NAACP the sustained outpouring of community support meant there was the possibility of building a mass civil rights movement. Back in New York City, Baker worked with Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison to organize a meeting that launched the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Moving back to Atlanta to head up the SCLC's voter registration drive, Baker saw the SCLC as a vehicle for the creation of a mass movement based on local leadership and organizing.

Four students launched a sit-in to desegregate a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, NC on February 1, 1960. By April, anti-segregation sit-ins had taken place in 125 cities. Baker helped organized a meeting of leading Southern student activists that spring. The SCLC provided the funding, but Baker counseled the students to maintain their independence rather than become a youth affiliate of SCLC.

The creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) provided new energy for the civil rights movement. Based in local activism, SNCC organized direct action and voter registration in both urban and rural areas of the South. Able to adapt quickly to changing conditions, SNCC became the movement's cutting edge.

The activists who initiated the civil rights struggle, like those who led the CIO upsurge in its early days, were not focused on winning favor with politicians. Instead, their goal was to build a political force that could effectively demand change.

Among these organizers were long-time labor activists such as E.D. Nixon, a leader of the Montgomery NAACP and member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; ministers like James Lawson, Martin Luther King, and Fred Shuttlesworth; students such as Ruby Doris Robinson, Charles Sherrod, John Lewis, Diana Bevel Nash, James Bevel, Gloria Richardson and Bernice Reagon; grassroots organizers like Fanny Lou Hamer; and seasoned organizers including Medgar Evers and Amzie Moore. They found support in community educators such as Septima Clark.

The militancy and determination of the civil rights movement forced both Republican and Democratic administrations in Washington to take action against racist violence and in support of desegregation and the right of African Americans to vote.

The Republican Eisenhower administration dispatched troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce federal school desegregation rulings. Eisenhower insisted that the law be obeyed, but sought a compromise with Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, and repeatedly argued he could think of few things worse than using federal force.

The Kennedy administration, while trying to limit civil rights activism to voter registration drives, was also compelled to stem violent white resistance to the African-American freedom struggle in the South. (The liberal Kennedy also authorized the FBI wiretap of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders.)

The heart of the Kennedy administration's civil rights policy was to maneuver and compromise, hoping to get Southern Democrats to make the minimal concessions necessary and maintain Democratic control of the "solid South." Dr. King wrote that the negotiations between Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett and Kennedy over James Meredith's court-ordered admission to the University of Mississippi "made Negroes feel like pawns in a white man's political game." (Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters, America in the King Years, 1954-63*, 672)

Ultimately it was Lyndon Johnson, a white Texan, who presided over the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which effectively abolished legal segregation and re-enfranchised Black voters in the South.

In February 1964 SNCC workers decided to launch a broad campaign to register Southern Black voters. SNCC activists combined "freedom registration" of voters in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) with registering African-American voters in the official Democratic Party.

In the weeks following the founding of the MFDP, its members attempted to attend precinct and county meetings of the regular party, but were excluded. They organized independent MFDP precinct and county meetings to establish their party's legitimacy, preparing to challenge the regular delegation at the national Democratic Convention in Atlantic City that August.

Victoria Gray, a civil rights worker from Hattiesburg, was chosen to oppose Senator John Stennis, and SNCC worker Fanny Lou Hamer was to be a congressional candidate. Eight hundred delegates attended the MFDP state convention and elected sixty-eight delegates to go to Atlantic City.

President Johnson was determined to avoid any action that might weaken his support among Southern whites and asked the FBI to surveil MFDP forces. The delegation realized they might not achieve their goal of unseating the regular delegation, but expected a compromise that would seat both delegations.

Instead Johnson, after heavily pressuring the Credentials Committee, offered Aaron Henry and Edwin King at-large seats at the convention, while the others would be "guests." Additionally, it was promised that the 1968 convention would bar any state delegation that discriminated against Blacks. Despite the intense lobbying from liberal Democratic stalwarts like Walter Reuther of the UAW, the MFDP delegates overwhelmingly rejected the compromise.

Some MFDP leaders, and particularly SNCC activists, saw the 1964 Democratic National Convention as a test of their strategy of appealing to the federal government. They concluded that mainstream liberal allies — especially the civil rights and labor establishment — had deserted the MFDP because their ties to the national Democratic Party were paramount.

These activists drifted away from MFDP, seeking more radical political alternatives. Many were attracted to the ideas of Malcolm X, who in the last year of his life was embracing a strategy for African-American struggle that rejected reliance on either the Democrats or Republicans.

The success of the civil rights struggle in the South demonstrated both the power of collective, direct action and the limits of legal equality. While the end of Jim Crow and disenfranchisement was a tremendous step forward for African Americans and other people of color, neither the Civil Rights Act nor the Voting Rights Act attacked the systematic and institutionalized racism that was quite visible in the northern cities.

Disproportionate levels of unemployment and poverty, job discrimination, residential segregation and unequal education all persisted despite the establishment of legal equality. The "ghetto insurrections" of 1965-1968 led a generation of Northern African-American activists to seek more radical solutions to the problems of racism, poverty and exploitation.

Organizations like the Black Panther Party and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers took up the demand for "Black Power" first raised by SNCC leaders like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. "Black Power" was a call for African-American self-organization and for a mass movement that would confront the connections between institutional racism and the capitalist system. "Black power" resonated with many young African-American activists who had organized in the South and who had gone through the MFDP experience.

Toward the end of his life, Martin Luther King sought to make these links through his Poor People's Campaign, which sought to force the federal government to radically expand jobs creation programs for the working poor, and establish national health insurance. King understood that as long as "profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the triple evils of racism, militarism and economic exploitation are incapable of being conquered." (Manning Marable, *Black American Politics*, 105).

The new wave of militancy among African Americans and other people of color forced both the Democratic Johnson

and Republican Nixon administrations to enlarge government social services to an unprecedented extent. Johnson's "War on Poverty" programs focused on education and job training, but did little to redistribute income through job creation, a higher minimum wage, or new social entitlements.

Perhaps the most important long-term effect of Johnson's effort was the creation of "Community Action Programs" that sought to integrate poor people and their advocates into the administration of the new education and job training programs. From the ranks of the administrators of federal anti-poverty agencies, a new layer of African-American Democratic activists were recruited, many of whom would become elected local and state officials in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

It is a testament to the power of the Black struggle that it was able to compel Richard Nixon, the most right-wing president in a generation, to implement social welfare policies that were much more radical than the Democrat Johnson. Under Nixon, not only was federal affirmative action in employment and education established, but the minimum wage raised, new entitlements and jobs programs created, new workplace health and safety regulations enacted, and there was a national discussion of the possibility of establishing a federally guaranteed minimum annual income.

African Americans and people of color alone were unable to mount a successful challenge to the systemic capitalist roots of institutional racism. The logical ally in such a struggle, the labor movement, had been tamed by the post-war prosperity. The AFL-CIO's bureaucracy was steeped in business unionism, conservatism, and reliance on electing Democratic "friends of labor."

Separated from the organized working class, African-American and other radicals of color were effectively marginalized and all too easily repressed. The FBI and other federal and local law-enforcement agencies were systematically infiltrating and undermining the civil rights and Black Power movements.

By the end of the 1960s, federal operations like the FBI's COINTELPRO — set up in 1967 during the Democratic Johnson administration — were literally wiping out radical Black leaders and brutally disrupting organizations like the Black Panther Party. By the end of the 1970s twenty-eight Panthers had been killed and many others were in jail or forced to leave the country to avoid arrest.

As the radical Black left declined, a new layer of politicians began to take political leadership in the African-American

community. Many of these new Black Democrats were recruited from the ranks of the "Great Society" anti-poverty programs. These forces were already removed from the arena of militant social protest and reliant on the national and local Democratic machine for their positions in the new social service and educational apparatus.

For these moderate Black leaders the election of more people like themselves to office as Democrats was the natural strategy for the advancement of African-American interests. By the early 1970s, the debate between "protest" and "politics" in the African-American community was decided in favor of a newly emerging Black Democratic urban machine.

In its own terms, the new Black Democratic machine was very successful. Before 1965 there were fewer than 500 African-American elected officials in the United States. Today there are more than 5,000 in the South alone. Between 1901 and 1955, only four African Americans served in the House of Representatives. Today, the Congressional Black Caucus boasts thirty-eight members.

The number of African Americans in both the federal and state legislatures grew from fewer than 200 in 1970 to over 600 today. While most of the African-American elected officials are found in small towns and cities and on school boards, Black mayors have run a number of major urban centers such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Boston and New York.

African Americans still hold proportionately fewer elected offices than their percentage of the U.S. population. Black electoral successes, however, have brought some gains to African-American communities. African-American elected officials have been able to extend government contracts to minority businesses as well as hiring minority administrators and professionals. There has also been some improvement in the delivery of vital services — garbage collection, repairs to public housing, schools and community centers — to the Black community.

Most big city police departments are no longer run by notorious racists — although police brutality hasn't disappeared by any stretch of the imagination.

More significantly, though, African-American elected officials — especially those running towns and cities — have been forced to administer austerity. Like their white counterparts, mayors and other elected officials of color have had to cut social services, on which working class and minority communities most rely. They have opposed the demands of teachers and other public employees

(the majority of whom, in many municipalities are people of color).

At the same time, local officials, Black and white, have sought to stimulate investment in their areas through tax breaks and other subsidies to the corporations. The "urban redevelopment programs" of Black mayors in the big cities have gutted working-class and poor neighborhoods, while "revitalizing" the center cities with new office towers and middle-class shopping malls.

Overall, while a new African-American middle class of small business people, professionals and managers have benefitted from the emergence of minority-run Democratic city governments, the vast majority of working and poor people of color have borne the brunt of declining numbers of unionized public and private sector jobs, the growth of low-wage employment in urban services, and social service austerity.

At the federal level, despite the loyalty of African Americans and other voters of color to the Democratic Party and the growth of Black and Latino representation in Congress, social services such as AFDC continue to be dismantled and affirmative action rolled back, even under the Democratic Clinton administration.

In place of anti-capitalist radicalism, the new Black Democratic establishment — along with the rest of the Democratic Party — is promoting "free market" solutions to poverty and despair in Black America. Charles Rangel, the African-American New York Democratic Congressman — ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, Chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and founding member of the Black Congressional Caucus — is leading the way. ([http://rangel.house.gov/lez\\_vision.shtml](http://rangel.house.gov/lez_vision.shtml))

Rangel is one of the leading advocates of "enterprise zones" in depressed urban communities. In these "enterprise zones" — often described as "North American maquiladoras" — corporations willing to invest are given huge subsidies and tax breaks and the public education system is revamped to serve the labor needs of the new local employers. The "enterprise zone" in Rangel's Harlem home district has transformed 125th Street into a shopping mall for Harlem's middle class, but has brought mostly low-wage, part-time and seasonal employment to Harlem's working-class and poor residents.

Once again, as "politics" — support for the Democrats — replaced "protest," the movement declined and the gains of the past came under attack. Today, antiracist activists are engaged in a bitter defensive battle to preserve what

remains of affirmative action, while African-American Democrats are almost giving up the fight for real improvements in social welfare and expanded public sector employment.

## The Anti-Vietnam War Movement and the Democrats

Beginning in 1965, thousands of students, civil rights activists and radicals began to build a movement against the barbarous U.S. war against the Vietnamese people. Over the next eight years, millions of people took to the streets to demand that Washington cease its brutal bombing of Vietnam and withdraw its nearly 500,000 ground troops from Southeast Asia.

Although the antiwar movement was organized around opposition to the war, contingents and feeder marches allowed extensive self-organization. African Americans carried banners with slogans such as "No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger." Asian Americans and feminist contingents connected their issues to the war. Native Americans, who were organizing fish-ins and reoccupations of their historic land, made the point that U.S. foreign policy was similar to the government's policy of extermination, forcible removal and paternalism toward them. Beginning in 1968 veterans — including Vietnam vets — and antiwar GIs often led the marches.

The antiwar movement utilized a diversity of tactics — from teach-ins and sit-ins at colleges and universities across the country to mass demonstrations of up to one million people in Washington, DC and San Francisco; from draft resistance to organizing active-duty GIs and Vietnam veterans against the U.S. war. The antiwar movement's ability to disrupt "business as usual" for almost eight years was the source of its power and radicalism.

The antiwar movement created a generation of activists who understood that the Vietnam war was not a "mistake" — as moderates and liberals claimed — but part and parcel of U.S. imperialism's strategy to dominate the world. Repulsed by the naked face of U.S. aggression, and inspired by the determined resistance of the Vietnamese, the Black revolt and growing worker unrest at home, and their own power, thousands of young people embraced radical, anti-capitalist politics in the 1960s and early 1970s. As Max Elbaum points out in his recent book of the same name, "revolution was in the air" after 1968.

The antiwar movement had a powerful impact. Together with the determined military resistance of the Vietnamese, the movement forced the U.S. state to first de-escalate its war and to eventually withdraw in defeat from Indochina. After being elected with the largest majority in U.S. history in 1964, Lyndon Johnson was forced by antiwar protests to withdraw from the 1968 presidential race.

## NIXON WROTE THAT "ALL THE PROTESTS" HAD PREVENTED THE U.S. FROM USING NUCLEAR WEAPONS AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE.

Even more importantly, Johnson temporarily stopped the bombing of northern Vietnam and initiated negotiations with the Vietnamese resistance movement. The antiwar movement continued to grow under the right-wing Republican administration of Richard Nixon. Nixon, no "dove," was forced to begin to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam in 1969. He later wrote that "all the protests" had prevented the U.S. from using nuclear weapons against the Vietnamese.

In late 1969, one of Nixon's aides sent a top secret memorandum to Henry Kissinger warning that "[t]he nation could be thrown into internal physical turmoil," requiring the "brutal" suppression of "dissension," if the U.S. used nuclear weapons. They were afraid not of Congressional Democrats or electoral opposition but mass, militant mobilizations.

In 1973, after unsuccessfully trying to bomb the Vietnamese into submission, Nixon was forced to engineer the final withdrawal of U.S. troops from Indochina. Despite Nixon's claims to the contrary — and continuing U.S. aid to the puppet regime in southern Vietnam — the U.S. withdrawal in 1973 was tantamount to a surrender. In 1975, the Vietnamese national resistance took power.

From the beginning of the antiwar movement, moderate and liberal forces tried to convince activists to channel their energies into the election campaigns of ostensibly antiwar Democrats. In 1968, many young people opposed to the war flowed into the campaigns of Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy. Kennedy's assassination cleared the way for the nomination of Hubert Humphrey. Humphrey, who became Johnson's vice-president as a reward for his role in convincing the MFDP delegation not to "disrupt"

the 1964 convention, was one of the engineers of the escalation of the Vietnam War.

The pro-war Democratic establishment did not merely marginalize the McCarthy forces — who received no platform concessions or positions in the Democratic leadership — in the institutions of the party. At the Chicago Convention in 1968, Democratic Mayor Richard Daley unleashed his notoriously racist and brutal police force on antiwar demonstrators, many of whom were McCarthy supporters.

The McCarthy campaign was a diversion for the antiwar movement. There was, however, a significant wing of the movement that rejected reliance on the Democrats. Part of this left wing also built the antiwar 1968 presidential campaign of Black Panther Party leader Eldridge Cleaver on the Peace & Freedom Party ticket, which provided a small but significant alternative to the morass of Democratic Party politics — despite many antiwar activists' support for Kennedy or McCarthy.

After 1968, there was a significant core of organizers that insisted on continuing to build street demonstrations and other active forms of protest. As the war continued and tens of thousands of GIs — disproportionately working class and people of color — died, the activist core was able to maintain an antiwar movement whose power the Democratic-controlled Congress as well as Nixon, the right-wing Republican, had to recognize.

In 1972, the liberal and moderate wing of the antiwar movement did what it could not in 1972 — it captured the Democratic Convention and nominated George McGovern for president. However, the real centers of power in the Democratic Party — the capitalists and labor officials who funded the Democrats — simply refused to campaign for McGovern. Further, millions of dollars that would have usually funded a Democrat flowed into the campaign of Richard Nixon. The result was Nixon's "landslide" reelection in 1972.

Hoping never again to alienate the corporate backers of the Democrats and disgusted with the AFL-CIO's role as a "special interest" in the party, many former McGovern forces became central leaders of the Democrats' drift to the right in the 1980s and 1990s. Both Bill Clinton and John Kerry were moderate opponents of the war in Vietnam, enthusiastic supporters of George McGovern in 1972, and key architects of the Democratic Party's embrace of "free market" neoliberal politics in the past two decades.



# The Women's and Gay & Lesbian Movements

The "second wave" of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked the coming together of two groups of women. The first were young activist women in the civil rights and antiwar movements who discovered an "invisible barrier" that limited their full participation in social movements. The subtle, and not so subtle, sexism of many male leaders of the civil rights and antiwar movements convinced many women of the need to organize independently.

The second were working women, who found sexist laws and practices that limited them to the "pink collar ghetto" of low-paying clerical and service jobs. Given the social ferment of the 1960s, these women began to discuss and define their problems and formulate challenges to a status quo that rigidly defined "womanhood."

The energy of the early women's movement came out of local consciousness-raising groups, caucuses within unions and professional organizations, and independent women's organizations. It was based on campus, in the workplace and in the community. It raised a public discussion of issues previously defined as "personal," and thus beyond public awareness: the way gender forces individuals to assume rigid social roles, inequality within the family, violence against women, and sexuality.

This meant that it had to confront homophobia and welcome lesbians as lesbians into the women's movement. It examined every institution within society, and demanded the right of women to control their own bodies and their own lives.

When Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminist Mystique*, called for women to celebrate the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage by "getting out of the kitchen and into the streets," enough women's organizations had been created to organize local demonstrations in hundreds of cities on August 26, 1970. Hundreds of thousands of women poured into the streets around three key themes: "Equal Wages for Equal Work," "24 Hour, Community-Controlled Childcare," and "Free Abortion on Demand."

The feminist challenge introduced the demand for women's equality into every element of U.S. society — including religion, politics, work, sports and the media. The women's movement changed many aspects of society and transformed women's expectations of themselves.

The vision women dreamt has not become the reality. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was defeated; women are still concentrated in low-paying clerical and service jobs; violence against women is an everyday occurrence. While

the overwhelming majority of women — including women with young children — work outside the home, childcare remains the responsibility of individual women.

The movement also developed "speak outs" in which women talked about "illegal" abortions they or their friends and relatives had. The dramatic testimony illustrated the need to abolish repressive anti-abortion laws. After a series of class action suits and demonstrations at state capitols across the country, and growing judicial opinion that laws banning abortion violated the U.S. Constitution's protection of privacy, in 1970 the New York State legislature legalized abortion.

In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional all state laws restricting abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy, allowing some restrictions in the second trimester and further restrictions in the third. Despite this legal victory, abortion remains unavailable in most counties across the United States.

Over the last thirty years — even as the mainstream women's movement has become increasingly integrated into the Democratic party — federal and state laws have circumscribed women's right to choose. Restrictions on public funding for abortions have severely limited poor women's access to reproductive health care.

While the women's movement's agitation against forced sterilization of poor women and women of color resulted in stricter federal guidelines for sterilization procedures, women's reproductive needs remain unmet. Today, the policies needed to guarantee women's reproductive freedom — from quality sex education to the resources needed to raise healthy children — are absent from the agenda of both the Republicans and Democrats. In a society that values "responsibility" and "hard work," women — particularly women of color — are demonized as "lazy," "irresponsible" and "sexually promiscuous."

The "culture wars" launched by the radical right targeted, to a large extent, the women's movement. The conservative assault glorified women's secondary status in the name of "traditional values." It gave the status quo forces in Congress and in the state legislatures the justification to wait out the time limit on the ERA, to deny women on welfare the right to abortion and, later, to limit their right to public assistance.

The feisty women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s no longer exists. But it established a diffuse feminist consciousness and left behind a number of marginally confrontational women's organizations. Some local groups

continue to organize, such as the antiwar Women in Black groups, women fighting for environmental justice, and women of color organizations struggling against both racism and sexism.

National organizations, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), have paid staff that enable them to issue statements or organize conferences and actions. Gender studies courses at the university are educating the next generation of women, but these classes have never had a secure funding base and today they are threatened by the economic crisis in higher education.

The weakness of the contemporary women's movement is clearly rooted in the decline of other social movements, the loss of several important feminist battles, economic insecurity, widening inequalities and a sustained right-wing offensive. However, the failure of the women's movement to develop an independent political voice that can pose an alternative pole of attraction to right-wing ideas has also contributed to the movement's decline.

In the early 1990s, Ellie Smeal, former president of NOW and head of the Feminist Majority, organized a conference for women and their allies in the labor and civil rights movements to discuss independent political action. The energetic conference produced a platform and called for the formation of a new party, a Party for the 21st Century. But it was stillborn, disappearing without even an explanation for its demise.

## THE FEISTY WOMEN'S MOVEMENT OF THE LATE 1960S & EARLY 1970S NO LONGER EXISTS.

Like its allies in the trade unions, the main-

stream women's movement decided to be "practical" and mobilize its members to support one or another Democrat (and an occasional Republican). The "there are two political parties" orientation of the Women's Political Caucus has reinforced such a decision. Like the trade union movement, NOW did not mobilize against the anti-women legislation passed under the Clinton administration — from NAFTA to the abolition of "welfare as we have known it."

For the 2004 presidential election NOW voted to support Carolé Moseley Braun as the Democratic candidate, as "a prime example of what feminists strive for." (See "NOW Targets George W. Bush for Defeat in 2004," *National NOW Times*, Fall 2003). Since Moseley Braun has withdrawn from the race and thrown her support to Dean, will NOW and

the mainstream feminist organizations will line up behind whomever the Democrats nominate — no matter how vacillating on issues of reproductive rights, social welfare and other issues of concern to working women?

The contemporary gay and lesbian movement, while tracing its origins to the "homophile" movement of the 1950s, "came out of the closet" with militant street actions against police harassment such as the Stonewall "riots" of 1969. As it has other social movements of the past half century, the relationship of direct action and electoral politics has divided the LGBT movement.

During the past two decades, organizations like ACT-UP have kept traditions of Queer direct action alive. However, most of the national LGBT organizations, like the women's and labor movements, are committed to "practical" politics — lobbying elected officials and influencing the outcome of elections.

Although a small number of gay and lesbian activists have been active in the Republican Party, especially through its "Log Cabin" caucus, the majority have supported Democrats. The high-watermark of gay and lesbian activism in the Democratic Party was at the end of the Reagan era.

Queers' energetic support of Bill Clinton's election in 1992 was rewarded with his "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" directive to the military. Criticized by the movement at the time, this directive has led to even more harassment of gays in the military.

In 2004, the mainstream gay and lesbian organizations are again lining up behind some Democratic "lesser evil." While 12% of gay and lesbian voters polled by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) indicated that they would vote for a third party candidate — a high percentage, to be sure, in relation to the overall population — 76% were willing to vote for whomever the Democrats nominate to defeat Bush.

Dean's support of Vermont's civil union law won him the greatest support among gay and lesbian voters — he was preferred by 33%, compared to only 10% for John Kerry, and less than 10% for the rest of the Democratic nominees. ([www.nglftf.org/news/printed.cfm?releaseID=568](http://www.nglftf.org/news/printed.cfm?releaseID=568))

Ultimately, the loyalty of the vast majority of the Queer electorate to the Democrats guarantees that the Democrats are under no compulsion to make any serious commitment to extending their rights. As with the support of labor, racial minorities and women, the Democrats can take the support of the majority of Queers for granted.

# The Rainbow and the Democrats

In the early 1980s, after nearly a decade of declining activism, promising new struggles began to emerge. Confronted with the Republican Reagan administration's attacks on unions (air traffic controllers) and social services, in the midst of a deep recession, and with the administration's arming of right-wing death squads in Central America, radicals and working people began to organize.

A movement against U.S. intervention in Central America, which had roots in the organizing against the introduction of draft registration under the Democratic Carter administration, was able to mobilize tens of thousands in national demonstrations.

The AFL-CIO mobilized hundreds of thousands against union busting and in defense of social security at "Solidarity Day" in 1981, and a handful of significant strikes against concessions popped up in heartland towns such as Austin, Minnesota in the mid-1980s. In the Midwest "rust belt," unemployed workers organized and demanded increased social services for those displaced in factory closings. Civil rights organizations organized a thirtieth anniversary "March on Washington" in 1983.

Radicals and other activists in these struggles against "Reaganism" sought ways to build solidarity among their different movements. For many, Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 appeared to offer that opportunity.

Many activists in 1984 believed that Jackson's campaign represented an electoral revolt by the African-American community and opened the possibility of building a "Rainbow Coalition" of working and poor people against Reaganism. Many also believed that the registration and mobilization of millions of Black voters would force the Democrats to move to the left.

Jackson's 1984 campaign did little to either build the incipient movements against Reaganism or move the Democrats to the left. Despite Jackson's "rainbow" rhetoric in 1984, his platform was very vague and never took up any of the specific demands of the social movements. The Rainbow Coalition remained a letterhead organization of prestigious movement individuals, not an organization with an active membership to set its direction.

Nor did any of the main forces of official reform in the Democratic Party flock to the first Jackson campaign. A significant portion of African-American elected officials refused to support Jackson's challenge, and the AFL-CIO gave Walter Mondale an unprecedented early endorsement in 1984.

In 1988, the situation appeared much more favorable to the advocates of the "Rainbow" strategy in the Democratic Party. Jackson's campaign openly criticized U.S. policy in Central America and Southern Africa, supported strikes and union demands for greater legal protection, and put forward a left-populist program calling for greater regulation of corporations and social welfare policies that would redistribute income.

The Rainbow Coalition, at its October 1987 convention in Raleigh, NC made some small strides toward becoming a membership organization, chartering twenty-five state organizations. Within the Democratic Party, the relationship of forces seemed to be shifting. With Reagan out of the running and no Democratic front-runner in the primaries, most Democrats of color and a significant number of labor leaders endorsed Jackson's campaign.

Jackson's success in the primaries — polling 6.8 million votes (29%) in 1988 compared with 3.2 million (18%) in 1984 — seemed to give the Rainbow Coalition an unstoppable dynamic. Yet the outcome of the 1988 Jackson campaign was, in some ways, even worse for the radicals and social movement activists than the 1984 campaign.

Because the Jackson campaign promised to be more successful than 1984, it was run in a much more traditional manner. In 1984, the African-American churches and the radical and activist-led Rainbow Coalition organizations ran the campaign. In 1988, Gerald Austin, a white centrist Democrat from Ohio, managed the Jackson campaign, and Willie Brown, a Black millionaire, mainstream Democrat and former speaker of the California Assembly was its chair.

Movement activists and leftists were pushed out of almost all positions of responsibility in the campaign, and the Rainbow Coalition was stripped of the financial and staff resources that would have been required to maintain it as an independent rank-and-file movement that could live beyond the primaries.

Not surprisingly, Jackson moderated his campaign rhetoric as he appeared to become a "force" in the Democratic presidential race. Not only did Jackson downplay the struggle against racism in favor of "finding a new economic common ground," but he provided little programmatic content to his denunciations of "corporate greed."

Ultimately, the Achilles heel of the Jackson campaign and the efforts of the Rainbow Coalition were their commit-



# INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION is a difficult proposition in the United States, with its deeply entrenched two-capitalist-party system. Despite the obstacles, however, it is not impossible. In fact there are a number of examples that have produced significant lessons for today and for the future.

The best-known historical example are Eugene Victor Debs' presidential campaigns under the Socialist Party banner early in the 20th century. In 1912 he received one million votes, which represented 6% of the popular vote. Debs' fifth and last presidential campaign was in 1920, when he campaigned from a prison cell after his conviction for antiwar agitation — and polled more than 900,000 votes.

In 1948 the Progressive Party was founded to oppose the Truman administration's Cold War policies and its domestic consequences. Its grassroots organizers were members of the Communist Party and those it attracted from the CIO and other mass movements. The party ran Henry Wallace (former vice president under Roosevelt) for president. Although party activists projected winning at least four million votes, early polls showed Wallace receiving eight million (about 17%).

Truman responded by adopting a left New Deal election strategy, de-emphasizing the Cold War, calling for national health insurance, repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act and a strong civil rights plank in the Democratic Party platform. Combining a progressive

social agenda with heavy-handed redbaiting, Truman stole the thunder from the Wallace campaign, which ended up with 2.4% of the votes cast. The Progressive Party was unable to survive the Cold War, conducting their last presidential campaign in 1952 on an anti-Korean War platform.

There have been other relatively recent radical third party movements that sought to give an insurgent political voice to communities of oppressed people. During the civil rights struggle activists in Lowndes County, Alabama built a local party called the Black Panthers. In Michigan, a Black Power political initiative called the Freedom Now Party achieved ballot status.

The National Black Political Assembly in Gary, Indiana in 1972 gave rise to a formation called the National Black Independent Political Party; NBIPP declined, however, when it was unable to forge a coherent national organizing project.

During the 1970s La Raza Unida Party, growing out of a radical Chicano movement in the U.S. Southwest, built significant bases of power in Texas, Colorado, and California. The movement's base was made up of descendants of the cultural and ethnic mix formed by the area's original inhabitants and the Spanish invaders.

A post-World War II "bracero" ("hand") program administered by the federal government brought Mexicans to work in agricul-

ture, keeping wages down, and preventing unionization in the fields. But by 1960 the mechanization of agriculture meant that Mexican immigrants, both documented and undocumented, had joined their Chicano brothers and sisters in barrios in all the major cities of the Southwest and Midwest.

The repeal of the bracero program created the opening for unionization among farmworkers, and by 1965 the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee began the now famous grape strike and boycott. Throughout the Southwest agricultural and cannery workers demanded the right to belong to a union.

These strikes and boycotts, in turn, spurred a radicalization particularly among Chicano youth, who were denied their right to speak Spanish on school grounds. By 1968, starting in Los Angeles, thousands of Chicano youth were staging school walkouts. These "blowouts" spread throughout the Southwest. Participants demanded the firing of racist principals and teachers, the right to use Spanish in the schools, and challenged the version of American history being taught.

Annual National Chicano Youth Conferences were organized under the auspices of the Denver-based Crusade for Justice. The 1970 conference called for a National Chicano Moratorium against the Vietnam War, which mobilized 30,000 Chicanos in Los Angeles around the demand "Bring Our Carnales

ment to the Democratic Party. While some in the left wing of the Rainbow hoped that the campaign could be used to build an independent political expression of the movements, this was never the goal of Jackson or the key forces in his campaign. Instead, African-American elected officials and left-wing union officials hoped that "our" party could be realigned on a "new economic ground as key to a new coalition and a new Democratic Party."

The notion of an independent political and organizational vehicle was foreign to Jackson and his top advisors, who — unwilling to even consider an independent Rainbow campaign — remained prisoners of a rightward-moving Democratic Party. At the Atlanta Democratic Convention

in 1988, Jackson's forces received at best token concessions — minimal funds for voter registration, minor positions in the Dukakis-Bentsen campaign, and an opportunity for Jackson to address the convention.

The Jackson forces' platform proposals for a U.S. renunciation of a nuclear first strike and for increased taxes on the wealthy went down to a 2-1 defeat, while their call for a Palestinian homeland was never brought to a vote. The nomination of conservative Texas Democrat Lloyd Bentsen for vice-president met with hardly a protest from Jackson and his closest aides. While Jackson was shocked that Michael Dukakis did not even consult him before nominating Bentsen, Jackson endorsed the ticket telling

Home." The demonstration was brutally attacked by the police and Ruben Salazar, a popular reporter, was murdered.

In 1967 Chicanos in Texas began holding Raza Unida conferences in response to President Johnson's Cabinet Hearings on Mexican Affairs. These and other conferences led to establishing a La Raza Unida Party. But it was the struggle for community control of the schools in Crystal City, Texas where the reality of an independent Chicano political party gained a foothold by 1970.

Activists then projected expanding into a twenty-six county area in south Texas that was predominantly Chicano. But the embryonic La Raza Unida parties of California and Colorado were not able to set down similar roots and eventually the Texas party was isolated — although it still exists.

All these efforts, of course, came under enormous pressure — particularly as African-American and Latino activists were recruited into the Democratic Party (and, occasionally, Republican Party) apparatus as staffers or elected officials.

In the absence of sustained, powerful national movements, these pressures ultimately overwhelmed small fledgling parties. These examples show, however, there is a long and determined challenge to the two-party stranglehold on politics.

his supporters that the Democrats "need two wings to fly."

The futility of "moving the Democrats to the left" though Democratic primary campaigns is a crucial lesson of the Jackson campaign of 1988 — one which is especially relevant for today. The Democratic Party is very secure in its support from African Americans, labor and progressives. So long as these forces remain tied to the Democrats, the Democratic mainstream has no reason to make any concessions to them.

For its part the Rainbow Coalition has been subsumed into Operation PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity), the Chicago-based organization that Jackson formed upon his split from the SCLC. PUSH seeks to "empower" African Americans through negotiating franchises and management positions with major corporations. Whatever the merits of this, it has nothing to do with political mobilization.

While Rainbow/PUSH has done some voter registration since 1988, it is primarily Jackson's personal vehicle to "advocate for a variety of public policy issues, including universal health care, equal administration of justice in all communities, sufficient funding for enforcement of civil rights laws, and for increased attention to business investment in underserved domestic communities (a theme that the Clinton administration picked up as the 'New Markets Initiative')." ([www.rainbowpush.org/founder](http://www.rainbowpush.org/founder)).

Jackson campaigned for Bill Clinton in both 1992 and 1996 — even after Clinton had signed NAFTA and helped abolish Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC). During the subsequent scandals, not only did Jackson ask the country to recognize that Clinton, "like all men, [had] sinned and fallen from the glory of God," but claimed "that Mr. Clinton has been good for America...his policies have helped workers, have helped seniors, have increased pay equity for women, more youth in schools. We are a stronger nation six years later." (*Direct Access: Jesse Jackson* Washington Post, December 16, 1998. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/talk/zforum/jackson121698.htm>)

Today, Jackson is an unofficial advisor to the centrist Democrat, Howard Dean. The impact of the "Rainbow" experience on the radical left and the social movements of the 1980s was not beneficial. Far from a left revival, many political groups and movement organizations collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the end, the Jackson campaigns didn't move the Democrats leftward either — rather, they rehabilitated the image of Democratic party politics and reincorporated the social movements and the left into today's plain and simple "lesser evil" orientation.

Our historical account could be extended and many more examples could be given. But the point should be clear enough. If we want to shift U.S. politics to the left, the key lies in creating a militant mass movement, independent of any politicians, in the streets, on the campuses, in the workplaces and communities of the oppressed. Therein lies the power to force liberal and conservative, Republican and Democratic regimes to make concessions to working and oppressed people.

Movements that disrupt "business as usual" also fuel political radicalism, and push the political center of gravity in their direction. Only electoral campaigns that are independent of the corporate dominated parties, like the Nader campaign in 2000, can give a voice to and build the social movements.

# • • • THE RIGHTWARD DRIFT, 1976- TODAY

For many on the left, the rightward drift in U.S. politics began with the Republican Ronald Reagan's ascension to the White House in 1980. According to this analysis, the Republican's return to power initiated the rollback of the hard fought gains working and oppressed people made in the 1930s and in the 1960s.

In fact, the shift in U.S. politics actually began much earlier — in the mid-1970s, under the Democratic Carter administration. We have already discussed one of the roots of the decline of liberal reformism in the United States — and in the rest of the capitalist world — in the 1970s: the decline of the insurgent movements.

A second major factor was the long crisis of capitalist profitability of the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s. If the decline of mass social protest—facilitated by the “lesser evil” politics of the leadership of the labor and social movements — made possible the corporate capitalist attacks on the reforms of the 1930s and 1960s, the capitalist economic crisis made these attacks necessary.

## Capitalist Crisis, Lean Production & Neoliberal Political Consensus

In the middle 1960s, U.S. capitalism and the rest of the industrialized capitalist world entered a prolonged period of economic crisis. Rates of return on corporate investment in the 1970s and early 1980s were some 30-40% below that of the 1950s and early 1960s. Through the mid-1980s, every recession was more severe than the last, as rates of growth continued to decline, investment stagnated and unemployment (and underemployment) grew steadily.

As the capitalist world economy stagnated, competition among capitalist firms grew sharper and the owners and managers of corporations around the world sought ways to restore their profits and their competitive edge.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. corporate executives experimented with different ways to improve profitability and competitiveness. After nearly twenty years of trial and error, they found a formula for restoring profitability and

reestablishing the dominance of U.S. corporations in the world economy — “lean production.”

The spread of lean production across the production of goods and services has two key elements. The first is the reorganization of work through a radical shift in the relationship of forces between employers and workers in factories, offices and stores. This reorganization of work has taken many forms: speedup, fragmentation of tasks, two-tier wage structures, outsourcing work previously done by unionized workers, use of temporary and part-time workers, increased management flexibility in setting hours and tasks, and cracking down on absenteeism while eliminating replacements for workers who are absent or retire.

The second aspect of lean production is the reorganization of the capitalist corporation. Since the early 1980s, we have seen U.S. corporations engage in waves of downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcies and “spinning-off” of unprofitable (or simply less profitable) operations. The result has been widespread destruction or “devalorization” of less efficient and less profitable capitalist firms.

Lean production's reorganization of work has simultaneously increased the ratio of profits to wages (fewer workers producing more goods and services at lower wages), and decreased total capital invested in plant and equipment (fewer firms). The result was a rise in profits that spurred the economic growth of the 1980s and 1990s.

Corporate executives acting alone could not have successfully spread lean production into all aspects of U.S. economic life. Government policies, from the late 1970s onward, quite openly aided and abetted the corporations' drive to increase profits at the expense of their workers and their competitors.

Capitalists abandoned their relative tolerance of regulation and reform that had marked the long era of growth of the 1950s and 1960s. As the political agenda of the capitalist class shifted, so did the programs of the capitalist parties. Whether Democrats or Republicans have been in the White House, the U.S. government has pursued “neoliberal” economic policies for over twenty years.

There are three main elements of neoliberal government policies. The first is global “free trade.” As most of us know, the goal of the WTO, NAFTA, GATT, and FTAA is not simply to remove tariff barriers to the free movement of finished goods across national boundaries. More importantly, “free trade” means removing any and all legal and

political obstacles to the free movement of transnational corporate investment.

Gutting environmental and labor protection, forcing governments to privatize publicly owned industries and services, and similar measures have helped create a world where U.S., European and Japanese transnational corporations can seek out the most profitable investments and create global production chains that link part suppliers in the "global south" to assembly plants in the "global north."

The second component of neoliberalism is the deregulation of the labor market. Across the capitalist world governments have moved to cut back or abolish social welfare, and to eliminate laws that restrict the ability of employers to hire and fire workers at will. The aims of these policies are simple — increase the number of workers in the labor market, increase competition for employment and maximize employer "flexibility" in hiring and firing. The result has been a downward spiral of wages, benefits and working conditions.

The third component is permanent fiscal austerity. Capitalist governments in Europe, the United States and Japan struggled successfully in the 1990s to close or eliminate state budget deficits, in order to limit or eliminate inflation.

Inflation is a problem because it allows some capitalist firms to survive the competitive battle in the market place by taking advantage of short-term fluctuations in the costs of inputs and the price of outputs. Limiting inflation disciplines capital, by making the reorganization of work along the lines of lean production the only way for corporations to compete successfully in the domestic and global market.

We can see the social costs of lean production and neoliberalism all around us in falling living standards and growing inequality — within the industrialized capitalist countries and between the imperialist "centers" and the less industrialized "periphery."

Workers in all parts of the world have experienced falling wages and are working longer and harder just to keep up. The meager social safety nets that existed in most capitalist countries are being dismantled, leaving individual families solely responsible for their survival in an increasingly competitive, dog-eat-dog world.

The "war of all against all" that lean production intensifies creates tremendous insecurity, which is a fertile ground for the growth of all sorts of social problems. Intensified competition for jobs, wages, housing and health care also pro-

motes various forms of racism, immigrant bashing, sexism and homophobia, as each group of working people attempts to maintain their slipping social and economic position at the expense of others.

As people become hardened to widespread suffering here at home, many are more easily manipulated into supporting foreign policy adventures — bombings, economic sanctions — that spread the suffering around the world.

The "common sense" of capitalist politicians across the world is that "free markets," "ending entitlements" and "fiscal discipline" are essential to economic growth and political stability. Despite their serious differences over "social issues" (legal equality for women and LGBT people, limited affirmative action), both the Democrats and Republicans share a commitment to neoliberal economic and social policies at home and abroad.

## The Democrats' Rightward Drift, 1976-1984

Rhetoric aside, the Democratic Party has never been "the party of working people." Only during periods of massive social unrest outside the electoral process have the capitalist-dominated Democrats made important concessions to working and oppressed people.

As previously discussed, the mass strikes of the mid-1930s and the formation of the industrial unions forced Roosevelt to launch the second "New Deal" of 1935-37 in the hopes of restoring social order. The civil rights movement in the South and the ghetto insurrections in the North compelled Johnson to create the "Great Society" programs of 1965-1968. The massive movement against the Vietnam War forced Johnson to end the bombing of North Vietnam, and forced the reactionary Republican Nixon to withdraw U.S. forces.

Conversely, ebbing social unrest and the end of the long era of capitalist growth, provided a fertile environment for the Democrats' drift to the right.

Capitalist influence over the Democrats and Republicans, both in and out of office, is exercised in numerous ways. First, corporate policy research institutes ("think tanks") like the Committee for Economic Development, Brookings Institution, American Enterprise Institute, Council on Foreign Relations and the Conference Board formulate economic and political policies for the capitalist class.

The "think tanks" have provided domestic and foreign policy programs and proposals to Democrats and

Republicans for decades. Business lobbying organizations like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers, and more recently the Business Roundtable all exert constant pressure on candidates and officeholders to protect corporate interests.

Second, the financial resources of corporations and wealthy individuals are essential to the ability of both the Democrats and Republicans to wage expensive, media-driven campaigns. To win an election and stay in office in the United States requires the steady and reliable stream of funds that only capital can provide.

Finally, corporate interests use their economic power to pressure federal and local governments to adopt pro-business policies. Without a high return on investment, businesses do not have the incentive to expand production, increase employment and stimulate economic growth. In the interest of encouraging private investment, the Democrats are as willing as the Republicans to provide tax breaks to corporations, spread "free trade" across the globe and take any other measures — at the expense of social services — that will increase profits.

The Democrats' drift to the right began before they lost the White House to Ronald Reagan in 1980. Between 1978 and 1980, the Carter administration and the Democratic controlled House and Senate cut social services (cuts in federal grant-in-aid to the state to finance social services), lowered corporate taxes (the maximum capital gains tax was lowered from 48% to 28%), and deregulated the airline and trucking industries in the hopes of raising profits and improving the competitiveness of U.S. corporations.

The Carter administration also attacked women's reproductive rights. Carter's Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Joseph Califano, stated that he and Carter "believe strongly that federal funds should not be used for abortion." Califano appointed Dr. Mildred Jefferson, former president of the National Right to Life Committee, to head up the Carter administration's family planning services.

Internationally Carter ramped up military support to murderous regimes in Indonesia, Morocco, Turkey, El Salvador, South Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines. Under Carter the U.S. vetoed UN resolutions to impose sanctions on the apartheid government of South Africa.

Despite the AFL-CIO leadership's support for both his 1976 and 1980 campaigns, Carter invoked the Taft-Hartley act in a failed attempt to force 160,000 striking coal miners back to work in 1978. In 1980, the administration

approved the Federal Aviation Management Strike Contingency Force — the plan Ronald Reagan would use in 1981 to break the air traffic controllers' strike and destroy their union, PATCO.

Carter also reintroduced Selective Service registration, began funding Islamist fundamentalists fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, attempted to prop up the Shah in Iran and Somoza in Nicaragua, and later, after Somoza's overthrow, began the covert U.S. war against the victorious Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

During the 1980s, the Democratic majority in both the House and Senate eagerly cooperated with the Reagan and first Bush administration's "supply-side" revolution. Taxes on corporations and the wealthy were cut to their lowest levels in over half a century.

Social services for the working poor were all but eliminated. Regulation of industry and the financial sector were gutted. PATCO was smashed. The most rapid growth of military spending in two decades was put in place — all with the support of a solid Congressional majority including large numbers of Democrats.

## The Emergence of the Democratic Leadership Council, 1984-92

Over the course of the 1980s, the Democrats' drift to the right accelerated and was crystallized in a new party leadership. The Democratic leadership twice rejected Jesse Jackson's proposals for a populist program to mobilize the "locked out" of all colors, more than eighty million working class and poor voters who had largely abandoned the electoral process.

Instead, a coalition of post-Watergate Democratic officeholders, organized in the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), consolidated their leadership over the party. DLC spokespersons in Congress and numerous state houses rejected attempts to win back dissatisfied voters among the working class, the poor, women, gays and lesbians and people of color. For these "New Democrats," the party needed to break its reliance on these "special interest groups" and move to the "center" in order to remain competitive with the Republicans.

The DLC argued that the Democrats needed to openly embrace the neoliberal agenda of fiscal austerity, free markets and trade, and dismantling of social service



## IN SHORT: SHUT UP ABOUT RACISM, MILITARISM & REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

"entitlements" in order to win the financial support of corporations and the votes of mainly white, middle-class, suburban voters who made up "the swing vote" of the active electorate.

In 1988, after Jackson's Rainbow Coalition insurgency floundered, Jackson mobilized the vast majority of his supporters, including many on the left, to support the party's standard bearer, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Dukakis was a model neoliberal and founding member of the DLC, one of many Democratic governors (like Mario Cuomo in New York and Bill Clinton in Arkansas) who had successfully adapted to the Reagan era cuts in federal aid to the state governments, through social service cuts and fiscal austerity.

Dukakis had pioneered state programs that promoted corporate investment in high-tech and military industries, introduced one of the first "workfare" programs in the country, and promoted collaboration between business and Massachusetts' extensive private and public higher education system.

Together with his conservative running mate, Lloyd Bentsen of Texas, Dukakis ran a thoroughly neoliberal campaign. Criticizing the Reagan administration for excessive spending on "wasteful" nuclear weapons (while defending a "strong" high-tech, conventional military), Dukakis and Bentsen advocated a new fiscal discipline and the rapid elimination of the record-breaking federal budget deficits of the 1980s.

Dukakis' defeat in 1988 showed what a loser this political strategy was — yet it only accelerated the Democrats' lurch to the right. The DLC increased its efforts to free the Democrats from the "special interests" (labor, racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians) and move the party to the "center."

The opening salvo in the DLC's offensive was the publication in 1989 of "The Politics of Evasion: Democrats and the Presidency" in 1989, written by William Galston, a campaign aide in DLC member Al Gore's unsuccessful 1988 Presidential campaign, and Elaine Kamarck, an advisor in DLC member Bruce Babbitt's 1988 campaign.

"The Politics of Evasion" explicitly rejected any electoral strategy that sought to mobilize working class and racial minority voters in support of traditional liberal reformist politics. Instead, they advocated the strategy of appealing to white voters in both the North and South and eschewing politics that made the Democrats seem "inattentive to their [white voters'] economic interests, indifferent if not hostile to their moral sentiments, and ineffective in defense

of their national security." (*"The Politics of Evasion,"* Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute, September 1989, 1).

In short: Shut up about racism, militarism and reproductive freedom. Many "old style" liberal Democrats, including Jesse Jackson, denounced the "Politics of Evasion," yet Jackson's and other liberals' commitment to the Democratic Party undermined their opposition to the DLC. Jackson argued that the Democratic Party "has a progressive wing. It has a conservative wing. But it takes two wings to fly" (*New York Times*, June 23, 1989); meanwhile the DLC established a new think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) to help consolidate its political and ideological dominance over the party.

Over the next three years, the PPI codified a neoliberal "New Democratic" political program that became Democratic common sense in the 1990s. The PPI program emphasized market-driven economic growth through the removal of regulations on corporate activities at home and abroad ("free trade").

The "New Democrats" differed with the Republicans on one key aspect of economic policy — the need to control the federal deficit. The Republicans in the 1980s — and again under the second Bush — were willing to run large deficits in order to cut taxes on corporations and the wealthy. "New Democrats" understood the need to impose "fiscal discipline" to limit inflation, the better to ensure that corporations remained competitive through reorganization of work along the lines of "lean production."

The commitment of the PPI and the "New Democrats" to balanced budgets coincided with their new attitude toward social welfare programs. Government spending should be limited to programs that promoted "equal opportunity" — like educational programs designed to prepare young people for work, and limited forms of affirmative action — rather than "equality of outcomes."

Programs that even hinted at redistribution of income and wealth (progressive taxation), guaranteed equal representation of women and minorities in jobs and education (affirmative action programs based on actual results, i.e. "quotas"), much less provided any alternative to the low wage work (AFDC) were rejected. Instead, a "new compact" between the poor and the government,

in which the poor had to provide "service" for their benefits (workfare), would become the norm.

The PPI and "New Democrats" also embraced "traditional cultural values." While the "New Democrats" embraced "diversity" and the elimination of legal discrimination on the basis of race, gender and sexual orientation, they argued that the Democrats must take up a defense of "moral traditions."

Whose traditions? For the "New Democrats" same-sex marriage and gays and lesbians in the military were rejected, the death penalty embraced, and the music of youth of color was vilified. Long before Clinton attacked Sister Souljah and other rappers, Tipper Gore, the wife of DLC stalwart Al Gore, spearheaded attempts to censor "anti-social" lyrics in popular music, an effort in which Jesse Jackson also participated.

Finally, the "New Democrats" advocated a "strong national defense." The DLC's 1991 convention adopted a "New American Choice Resolution" that praised the first Bush administration's victory in the first Gulf War and "endorsed a 'robust program' of military research as well as a retooling of the military so that it would remain strong in the face of post-Cold War reductions." (Kenneth Baer, *Reinventing the Democrats*, 180)

In essence, the PPI and DLC recognized that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European regimes created a new "unipolar" world. As the sole military superpower, the United States could afford to slow the rate of growth of defense spending. A "leaner" and more effective military would help reduce the government's budget deficits, and permit it to defend and export "democratic capitalism" around the world.

## 1992-2000: Victory of the "New Democrats"

The nomination and election of Bill Clinton in 1992 marked the triumph of the DLC and the "New Democrats" within the Democratic Party. Despite Clinton's neopopulist rhetoric ("It's the economy, stupid!"), his two terms in office were a consolidation — and in some areas a deepening — of the pro-corporate agenda of the Reagan and first Bush administrations.

The election of the "Contract on America" Republican majority in both houses of Congress in 1994, and the short-lived "Republican Revolution" of 1994-1996, facilitated the Democratic administration's rightward drift. According to

Kenneth Baer, a pro-DLC political scientist and speech writer for the Gore-Lieberman campaign in 2000:

*(T)he election of a radicalized bloc of conservatives to Congress freed Clinton from the obligation to work with a largely liberal Democratic congressional party. If Clinton wanted Congress to pass any of his legislative agenda, he had to propose policies that were palatable to at least some of the Republican majority. And to congressional liberals, these New Democratic policies, although not ideal in their eyes, were more acceptable than Republican proposals. Moreover, as the Republicans pushed the bounds of political debate further right, they created a political incentive for Clinton to embrace the New Democratic public philosophy, since that would give him the chance to woo the support of key groups in the electorate that the GOP had abandoned. (Reinventing the Democrats, 236-237)*

A quick review of the policies of the Clinton administration — passed with the support of the majority of Congressional Democrats — should remind all of us of the rotten fruit of "lesser evilism."

Under Clinton's presidency, social welfare was completely redefined — in a thoroughly reactionary manner. Early in the administration, labor and other progressive groups abandoned the fight for a single-payer health insurance in favor of Bill and Hillary Clinton's health care scheme, which would have provided federal subsidies for the growth of Health Maintenance Organizations. Clinton quickly deserted his own proposals in the face of opposition from the health insurance industry, leaving the United States as one of the few advanced capitalist countries without a national guarantee of health care.

One of the few campaign promises Clinton fulfilled was to "end welfare as we know it." The administration, with the support of the Republican Congressional majority and a substantial number of Congressional Democrats, successfully abolished AFDC and thereby ended the sixty-year entitlement of poor women with children to (admittedly meager) cash benefits.

"This is a bad bill, but a good strategy," said Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY), explaining why he voted for Clinton's proposal despite his support for AFDC. "In order to continue economic and social progress, we must keep President Clinton in office.... Sometimes in order to make progress and move ahead, you have to stand up and do the wrong thing."

One of Clinton's last contributions was to convene the Federal Advisory Council on Social Security. The

Commission's report advocated "reforms" ranging from investing up to 40% of the Social Security trust fund in the stock market (the proposal supported by organized labor and senior citizen groups), to the establishment of private "personal security accounts" that would be invested in private securities (a proposal supported by the financial industry and corporate policy groups like the American Enterprise Institute and the National Association of Manufacturers).

Again, the fruits of a "lesser evil" in office were a sharp shift to the right in the public discussion of social security. Practically no one demanded that the federal government raise taxes on employers to guarantee all people over 65 an adequate, guaranteed public pension.

Securing "fast track" negotiating authority for NAFTA in 1993 was only the most prominent piece of free market legislation passed during the Clinton-Gore years. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, actively promoted in Congress by Vice President Al Gore, eliminated most of the regulations on corporate investment in media and telecommunications.

The result was the frenzy of media and telecom mergers in the late 1990s, which has led to an enormous concentration of ownership. When Bush's Federal Communications Commission voted in 2003 to further deregulate corporate investment, they were only trying to complete what Clinton and Gore had begun.

The Clinton-Gore administration's policies brought even greater benefits to the corporate elite than the Reagan and Bush (the elder) regimes. According to the economist Robert Pollin:

*It was under Clinton that the distribution of wealth became more skewed than it had at any time in the previous forty years. Inside the U.S. under Clinton the ratio of wages for the average worker to the pay of the average CEO rose from 113 to 1 in 1991 to 449 to 1 when he quit. In the world, exclusive of China, between 1980 and 1988 and considering the difference between the richest and poorest 10 percent of humanity, inequality grew by 19 percent; by 77 percent, if you take the richest and poorest 1 per cent.*

*Under the full eight years of Clinton's presidency, even with the bubble ratcheting up both business investment and consumption by the rich, average real wages remained at a level 10 percent below that of the Nixon-Ford peak period, even though productivity in the economy was 50 percent higher under Clinton than under Nixon and Ford. The poverty rate through Clinton's term was only slightly better than the*

*Reagan-Bush years. (The Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity, as cited in A. Cockburn, "Clintontime: Was It Really a Golden Age?" Counterpunch, November 14/23, 2003; [www.counterpunch.org/cockburn/11142003.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/cockburn/11142003.html))*

Clinton's first Labor Secretary, Robert Reich, summed up both the pro-corporate record of the Clinton-Gore years and the pernicious logic of "lesser evilism" in 2000 ("*Why Business Should Love Gore*," *American Prospect On Line*, <http://www.prospect.org/print/V11117/reich-r.html>):

*No administration in modern history has been as good for American business as has the Clinton-Gore team; none has been as solicitous of the concerns of business leaders, generated as much profit for business, presided over as buoyant a stock market or as huge a run-up in executive pay.... The Clinton-Gore administration delivered on policies that Republicans failed to achieve — fiscal austerity, free trade, and a smaller government — and Al Gore was in the lead. This confirms a pattern to American politics: Once in office, recent Democratic presidents in an era of business dominance have had an easier time moving right rather than left from where they campaigned since their Democratic base has no one else to turn to.*

## COMMITTED TO THE STRATEGY OF "LESSER EVILISM," THE FORCES OF REFORM REMAIN PRISONERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

Corporate capital rewarded the Democrats' willing embrace of neoliberalism during the 2000 election. Before the 1960s, the Democrats were financed by and represented an alliance of Southern landowners and bankers, non-WASP (particularly Jewish and Catholic) capitalists, and urban realtors and developers. The Republicans received support from the vast majority of large corporate capitalists. In the 1960s, Southern capitalists abandoned the Democrats for the GOP.

Beginning in the 1980s, however, the U.S. capitalist class as a whole financed and supported both the Democrats and the Republicans. In 2000, the Republican still received the majority of capitalist funding (through corporate Political Action Committees and from wealthy individuals), but the Democrats received an unprecedented 40% of all capitalist campaign contributions.

These contributions came mostly from the legal, computer equipment and services, business services and media corporations; while oil and gas, general manufacturing, pharmaceutical corporations, electric utilities and general contractors still gave nearly two-thirds of their funds to Republicans. Nonetheless, traditionally Republican corporations in securities, health care and telecommunications gave over forty percent of their contributions to Democrats; and capitalists in insurance, air transport, retail sales and commercial banking gave over one-third of their contributions to Democrats. (*Center for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org/200elect/storysofar*)

## IRAQ WAS SUBJECTED TO ALMOST CONTINUOUS BOMBING DURING THE CLINTON-GORE YEARS.

Despite the Democrats' enthusiastic embrace of capital's political program and their marginalization of "special interests," the official leadership of the labor movement, the established civil rights and women's organizations, and other liberal organizations continued to give tens of millions of dollars to Democratic campaigns through the 1990s. Committed to the strategy of "lesser evilism," the forces of reform remain prisoners of the Democratic Party.

In the realm of civil liberties and the rights of immigrants, the "New Democratic" Clinton administration again opened the door wide to Bush's current offensive against democratic rights. Many of us are rightly concerned about the USA PATRIOT Act's threat to our personal and political freedom. We should be aware, however, that the vast majority of the thousands of detentions without trial, hearings or access to lawyers that have occurred since September 11, 2001 were done under the statutory authority of two Clinton administration-sponsored laws passed in 1996: the Immigration Reform and Control Act and the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act.

Many today argue that despite the bipartisan consensus on neoliberal economic policy, the Democrats and Republicans pursue very different foreign policies. Many believe that a Democrat in the White House would reject the Bush doctrine of preemptive war and aggressive unilateral military intervention.

In brief, the argument goes, although both parties support U.S. corporate imperialism, the Democratic "globalists"

generally embrace multilateral military action in collaboration with other imperialist powers (Japan and Western Europe), while Republican "hegemonists" are attempting to impose U.S. dominance through unilateral military actions like the conquest of Iraq.

The reality again is much more complex. While never risking budget deficits to finance a sharp rise in military spending, the Clinton regime slowly but surely increased the military budget over its eight years in office. By 2000, the U.S. military budget was approximately 85% of its size at the height of the Cold War.

The Clinton administration was not shy about using this military might. Even before the 1999 war against Serbia, Clinton sent U.S. troops into combat more than twice as many times as Reagan and Bush I combined. Bush II's "obsession" with Iraq had roots in the previous Democratic administration. Indeed, George W. Bush's monstrous criminal war would have been inconceivable if Clinton-Gore hadn't prepared the way.

Iraq was subjected to almost continuous bombing during the Clinton-Gore years. Democratic candidates in 2004 may attack Bush on Iraq, but their alternatives were and are unacceptable. Before the war, most of the Democrats supported continued sanctions, which were responsible for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths over the last decade; extending invasive inspections; and a multinational invasion of Iraq, rather than a "unilateral" U.S. action.

Today, except for Sharpton and Kucinich, the Democratic candidates are not advocating an end to the U.S. occupation — "now that we're there, we have to succeed." At most they favor the UN's administration of the military occupation.

The Clinton-Gore administration's own brand of military adventurism was often opposed — not by Congressional Democrats, but by then Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell. The "Powell Doctrine" attempted to limit direct U.S. foreign military interventions to situations where "vital U.S. interests" were at stake and where the military victory and domestic support were guaranteed.

According to Powell's memoirs, Madeline Albright, Clinton's Secretary of State and later UN Ambassador asked Powell "What's the point of having this superb military that you've always been talking about if we can't use it?" Powell claims that he almost had an aneurysm he was so upset. (*Cited in "Newsmakers: Madeleine Korbil Albright," ABC News.Com, <http://www.abcnews.go.com/reference/bios/albright.html>*)

Clinton's foreign policy also prefigured Bush's unilateralism. While the Clinton-Gore regime preferred to garner multi-lateral imperialist support (through either NATO or the UN) for U.S. military interventions abroad, it did not renounce unilateral action. During a UN Security Council discussion of Iraq in 1994, Albright announced "We will act multilaterally when we can, unilaterally when we must."

The Clinton administration bypassed the UN Security Council and imposed its version of "regime change" through military intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan, Kosova and Serbia. Clinton's sanctions on Iraq, which killed thousands of children, and Clinton's missile destroyed a Sudanese aspirin factory — claimed, falsely, to be producing weapons of mass destruction.

Writing from Europe during Clinton's 1999 bombing of Serbia, the late Daniel Singer recognized in Clinton's "humanitarian intervention," many of the developments the anti-war movement now faces:

*Whatever the origins of the conflict, for weeks now the main issue has been the shape of the new World Order, the position of the United States as the undisputed international gendarme, entitled to act as prosecutor, judge and executioner. What was and is at stake is the institutionalization of American hegemony in the new era following that of the Cold War...for Europe to begin with, and then for the world at large. The full consequences of this American victory have still to be measured, but some lessons can already be drawn from bitter experience. ["Against the Holy Alliance," Against the Current #81 (July/August 1999) <http://solidarity.igc.org/atc/81NatoSinger.html>]*

To illustrate the point, consider the author of this:

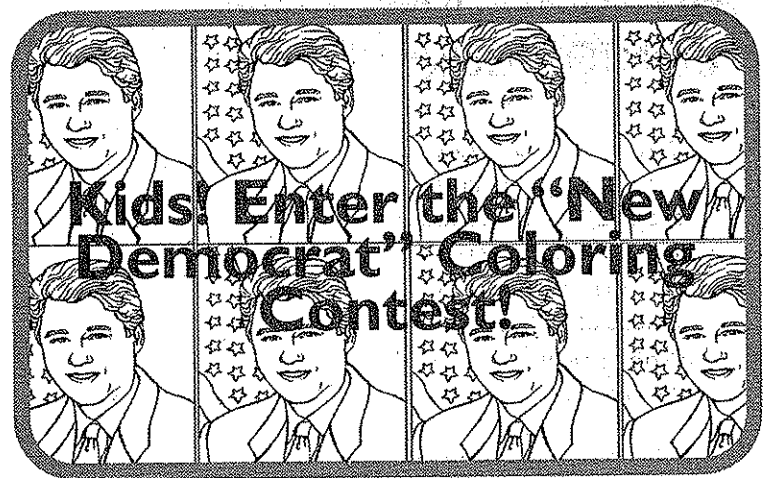
*What we need isn't the death of internationalism or the denial of our stark national interest. What I want to talk about today is a more enlightened nationalism that understands the value of international institutions but supports the use of military force — without apology or hesitation — when we must. An enlightened nationalism that does not allow us to be so blinded by our overwhelming military power that we fail to see the benefit, indeed the need, of working with others. To begin moving this nation in the right direction I believe we need to embrace a foreign policy of enlightened nationalism. First, we need to correct the imbalance between projecting power and staying power. America's military is second to none. It must and will remain second to none.*

Richard Perle? Paul Wolfowitz? Donald Rumsfeld? Nope: DLC mainstay Senator Joe Biden, September 7, 2003.

No matter how far to the right Clinton and the Democrats move, the advocates of "the lesser evil" — the labor officialdom, the leadership of the established civil rights, women's, Queers and environmental organizations — have refused to break with the Democrats.

Campaigns independent of Democratic and Republican corporate politics appear as "unrealistic" to these forces — even if these campaigns articulate the demands of the vast majority of working people.

The problem is that the strategy of "the lesser evil" hasn't worked, and less than ever will it work today. The loyalty of labor, racial minorities, women, LGBT people and other progressives — expressed in massive campaign contributions and large numbers of votes — comes at a very low cost for the "New Democrats," who know perfectly well

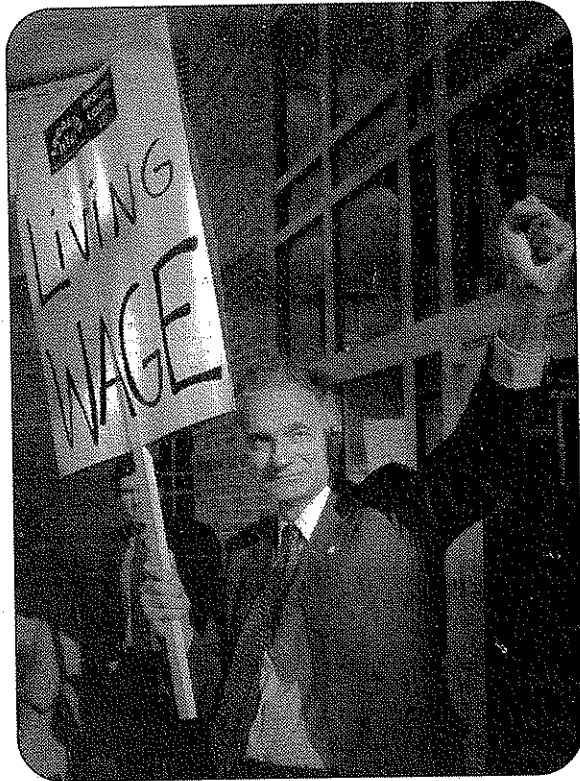


that no matter how far to the right they move, the advocates of "the lesser evil" remain their captives. Accordingly the Democratic leadership continues to move right — opening the way for an ever more right-wing Republicans.

During this long era of political stagnation — essentially since the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment and the mid-'70s effort for labor law reform — the institutional leaderships of the AFL-CIO and oppressed groups have sparked few if any important political initiatives. The demand for reparations for African-American slavery is a partial exception, but it has been embraced only by the most progressive fringes of the leadership.

For the most part, efforts to defend past gains have foundered on multimillion dollar lobbying efforts, while "hold your nose and vote" campaigns have not brought in large numbers of new activists to reform struggles.

The most important force opening space for radical politics in the past decade, until the recent development of mass



Ralph Nader, the Green Party  
Presidential candidate in 2000

antiwar mobilizations, has been the global justice movement. The ability of this movement to mobilize hundreds of thousands in the struggle for “another world is possible” is rooted, to a large extent, in its political independence from both corporate capitalist parties.

Building mass, direct street actions against the WTO, World Bank, and other organs of the transnationals in Seattle, Washington and Montreal, the global justice movement created vital space for the 2000 Nader campaign.

For the first time in more than half a century, a candidate independent of the capitalist parties won significant support for a left populist platform, denouncing corporate dominance of domestic and international politics, and defending the organizations and struggles of working and oppressed people. Winning three percent of the popular vote, despite vicious attacks from the AFL-CIO leadership and other Democratic Party liberals, the Nader campaign proved that there was a potential audience for radical progressive politics in the United States.

Today, the antiwar movement that was able to mobilize hundreds of thousands in U.S. cities against Bush's invasion of Iraq has the potential of pushing politics significantly to the left. However, much of that potential could well be dissipated as the movement is again pulled into the Democratic Party “lesser evil” in the 2004 election.

LGBT activists, for a generation, have used grassroots organizing to change the character of the country. Through teach-ins, creative direct action, and millions of conversa-

tions at work, school, family, and church, this movement has altered the political landscape. In most sectors of the country, outright bigotry and discrimination is much less tolerated and acceptance of Queer folks has never been more mainstream.

While repression and discrimination remain serious, the recent Supreme Court decision striking down sodomy laws illustrates our point: Movements can remodel the country and lay the groundwork for continued struggle — no matter who holds positions of official power.

If lesser-evil electoralism narrows the breadth and depth of organizing, what is the practical alternative in 2004? We believe that continuing to mobilize against the U.S. occupation of Iraq, forming alliances with the global justice movement, workers' struggling against the corporate offensive — and an independent global peace and justice presidential campaign — are the key elements of the alternative.

## • • • HOW TO WASTE YOUR VOTE: THE LESSONS OF 2000

During the 2000 presidential race there were often heated exchanges between supporters of Nader's Green Party ticket and those who said that to vote for Nader was to “waste your vote.”

The outcome of the 2000 elections is instructive. Gore won the election handily, in the old-fashioned sense of getting the most votes. He beat Bush by better than 600,000 votes — votes that were counted — and thereby hangs a tale (and a chad).

Due to the reactionary nature of the U.S. electoral system, it was necessary for Gore to win not the popular vote, which he had, but rather the Electoral College vote. Which he also would have, had the election not been flagrantly stolen in Florida.

Most of us are all too aware of the drama of the refusal to count thousands of paper ballots, effectively disenfranchising tens of thousands of voters in Florida counties with heavy African-American populations. This is not counting the huge numbers of Black voters who disappeared from the rolls, or were stopped at police roadblocks ordered on Election Day by Governor Jeb Bush.

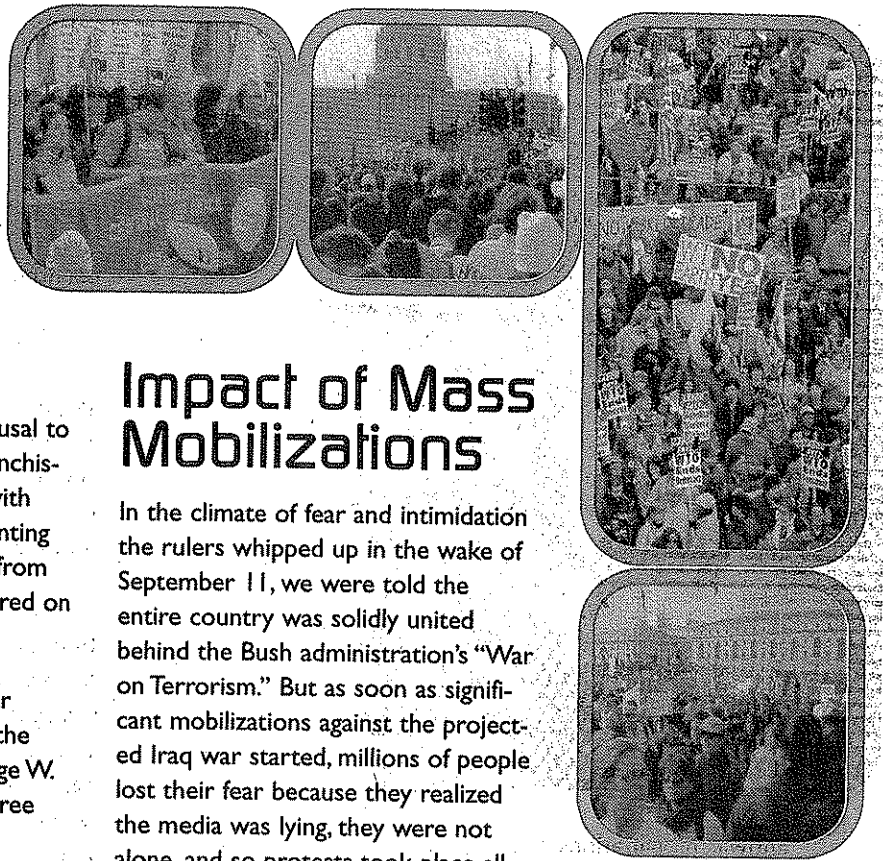
Finally, despite all evidence that Gore had won a clear majority of the votes in Florida — as he had across the country — the U.S. Supreme Court appointed George W. Bush as the President of the United States, ending three months of suspense and political instability.

Al Gore personally presided over that session of Congress as president of the Senate. Gore personally ruled out of order repeated attempts, mostly by Black members of the House of Representatives, to challenge the Florida electoral vote. Not a single member of the Senate — not one — was willing to join the members of the Black caucus in registering at least a symbolic protest against this fraud.

It wasn't the small minority that voted for Nader that "wasted" their vote. There is no bigger waste of your vote than to give it to someone who won't defend your right to have your vote counted.

As the Florida election fraud unfolded, Al Gore had a clear choice: he could either explain what was happening and call on working people, and especially the Black community, to demand an honest count, or he could go through the motions of limited recounts in Dade and a couple of other counties.

Gore chose to be loyal to the corporate ruling elite in the hope that they would reward him by saying all votes should be counted, and thus allowing him to occupy the office he had won. The alternative was to encourage mobilizations against the fraud. There is no evidence Gore ever considered this option.



## Impact of Mass Mobilizations

In the climate of fear and intimidation the rulers whipped up in the wake of September 11, we were told the entire country was solidly united behind the Bush administration's "War on Terrorism." But as soon as significant mobilizations against the projected Iraq war started, millions of people lost their fear because they realized the media was lying, they were not alone, and so protests took place all

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over the country. In some places, demonstrations were bigger than any held during the movement against the war in Vietnam.

People could see with their own eyes, and from the reactions of their friends, neighbors and coworkers, that the media claims of overwhelming support for Bush's projected war were lies.

Undercover attempts by Texas-based Republican radio monopoly Clear Channel Communications to manipulate people into supporting an invasion of Iraq by staging "Support our Troops" rallies in the name of individual DJ's fell flat on their face, despite extensive publicity from their own radio stations, Fox News, CNN and other corporate outlets.

What's more, the effort fueled a backlash. These corporate interests received a kick in the face when they tried to ram

through the FCC rule changes to allow them to further extend their control of radio and television broadcasting.

There was a tremendous outpouring of opposition, provoked to a large degree by anger over the corporate media acting as the mouthpiece of the Bush Administration. Opposition was so great that both Republican-controlled houses of Congress and the Republican-controlled judiciary moved to placate the opposition by canceling the rules changes.

As these examples show, our real power lies in our own independent mobilization and organization. Activists in the labor and social movements looking to use the electoral arena to promote our politics must never lose sight of this reality. The election campaigns we need are ones that seek to promote our real strength, which is outside the two-party-monopoly electoral arena.

Ralph Nader's Green campaign in 2000 shows that there is today in the United States a mass audience willing to consider breaking with the two parties of the rich to support a party that will challenge corporate rule. The 2003 California gubernatorial campaign, where Green Latino candidate Peter Miguel Camejo got more than 5% of the vote, is further confirmation.

As a result of that showing, California news media were compelled to treat Camejo as a major candidate in the special 2003 recall elections, routinely including him in polls and debates and covering his campaign events, thus helping him reach millions more.

## The California Experience

Camejo's campaigns addressed the big issues in that state as well as national and international questions. He called for reversing the trend towards a regressive tax structure by proposing raising taxes on the richest Californians to close the budget deficit. He championed the cause of Latinos, Blacks and other "minorities" who make up the majority of the state, and especially of undocumented immigrants.

Camejo denounced the marijuana prohibition that is used to persecute young Blacks and Latinos under the rubric of a "war on drugs." He has demanded the United States get out of Iraq now, and used his campaign to promote antiwar protests.



Photo by Alex Chis



Peter Camejo



Matt Gonzalez

Socialists and radicals of various stripes have debated specific positions Camejo did or didn't take. What matters is that his campaigns — like Nader's in 2000 — point to real alternative politics for Latinos, African-Americans and all working people. These campaigns break with the corporate two-party system and offer an electoral alternative.

The Green Party is growing precisely because it is a party that fights against the corporate rule and in support of the labor, anti-war, global justice and other

social movements. Its potential mass impact was shown by Matt Gonzalez's San Francisco mayoral campaign — which forced the Democrat into a hard-fought December 10 runoff, and took 47% of the vote despite being outspent ten to one.

The Greens have not asked activists to give up organizing mass, militant actions against the corporate rulers — as have every "progressive" Democrat since Eugene McCarthy in 1968. In 2000, Nader and the Greens campaigned as the candidate and party of the global justice movement — showing videos of the Seattle demonstrations against the WTO at all the "Super Rallies."

In 2004 we need an independent peace and justice presidential campaign that presents itself as the electoral voice of the anti-war, global justice and social movements. We in Solidarity will work together with other socialists, Greens, radicals and activists to help organize such a campaign.

