

# **The Democratic Party**

From Slavery to Obama –  
Loyal Defenders of Capitalism

Published by Speak Out Now  
Fall 2008

## **Introduction**

The 2008 national elections are being presented as historic and in some ways they are. The Democratic Party primaries consisted of a contest between an African American and a woman. And now the selection of Barack Obama as the Democratic presidential candidate means that an African American could be president. It is understandable that the appeal of breaking the color bar in the White House is great. It can be seen as a gesture against the deep-seated racism of this society. For those who have been part of the long fight against racism, or for women's rights, this certainly seems like a victory, something that few could have imagined 40 years ago.

In addition, Obama's messages of "hope" and breaking with the policies of the past are welcome and encouraging words, especially when contrasted with McCain's campaign, which is grounded in the same fear-based politics of the Bush administration. For many of Obama's supporters it is not just a matter of casting a vote. It is a matter of placing hope for change in his election.

## **Making History or Symbolic Gains?**

Every four years we are confronted with the question of national elections – of voting for the President of the U.S. as well as a variety of national, state and local representatives. The media and the politicians portray these elections as an opportunity for us to chart the course of our future. But each election has shown the futility of this gesture at the voting booth.

If voting really changed anything, why don't we see the most basic things we need in place? Why aren't the needs and desires of the majority represented? It really isn't because the majority votes against their interests. If people's votes really counted, we would have a good system of healthcare, education, transportation, employment and other things that the vast majority of people want, and that so many politicians promised before getting elected. We would have seen an end to wars long ago. History has made it clear that elections are not the means of change for the majority of people in our society.

To believe that the election of an African American man to the presidency is any more than a symbolic accomplishment is to ignore the reality of the past 30 years, during which time we have seen African American, Latino, and women mayors, governors and members of Congress elected. And what has been the result? Look at our cities, the prisons and the condition of life of many working people, minorities and women today. Life has not gotten better for those who are supposedly represented by these politicians.

While the Democratic Party has posed as the friend, supporter and champion of working people, minorities and women, the reality of its past is vastly different from how the party represents itself. The Democratic Party, from its origins after the American Revolution to the Obama ticket today, has always been the representative of the ruling class. It began as a party of the southern slave owners, and after the defeat of the slave-system has defended the interests of big business and the banks ever since.

Since its inception, the Democratic Party has partnered with the Republican Party to

defend the interests of the U.S. ruling class. Under their leadership, the top ten per cent of the population has vastly increased its amount of wealth at the expense of everyone else. Tax policies have allowed the corporations to pay little or no taxes and allowed the wealthy to keep their inheritances while middle-income and working class people pay taxes. Legislation has favored the interests of the rich and when profits were threatened, Democratic Party politicians have helped to arrange bailouts and subsidies for failing corporations or banks.

The Democrats have repeatedly used Taft Hartley and other anti-labor legislation against the unions and workers on strike. They have called out federal troops and used repression against workers on strike and Cointelpro and red squads to spy and attack activists in the Black movement and anti-war movements.

When the Democrats have appeared to act “in the interests” of the oppressed, it has been only when they were forced to by the pressure of social movements and struggles in the workplaces and in the streets and among young people and students. It was only when the ruling class faced a mass upheaval of working and poor people during the depression of the 1930s that the Roosevelt administration pushed legislation through that would appear to meet the needs of the people. Kennedy and Johnson didn’t intervene in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s or pass any civil rights legislation until the racist nature of this system was exposed to the world. As the media showed African Americans tearing down southern apartheid, met with the racist violence of the cops and mobs of white racists, the politicians had no choice but to act.

The Democratic Party poses as the party of peace and the defender of freedom around the world. But in reality, the Democrats have supported U.S. participation in every major war of the twentieth century from World War I to Iraq. Of course, when the population has demonstrated massively against these wars, to the point where it is possible to ride this opposition to win an election, then these Democratic Party politicians are ready to appear as anti-war candidates. They did this during the U.S. war against Vietnam and now today they are doing it again with the war on Iraq.

What the Democrats mastered early in their history and turned into a fine art is the ability to co-opt and channel social struggles. They have a well-developed tradition of appearing to respond to the demands of social movements. They are masters at appealing to those who have mobilized their forces in struggle to “work within the system” instead.

Once elected, the Democrats have then legislated some of what the masses had already won for themselves. History is then written to make it seem that the politicians delivered the victory, not that the politicians simply took credit for what people themselves had already accomplished.

And each time the workers, or those active in other social movements have fallen for these lies, have put their trust and faith in these politicians - what has been the result? Over and over again the lure of “working within the system” has been used to trick those who had shown their abilities to organize into becoming functionaries and bureaucrats for the system they were opposing. And instead of those active in struggle learning to count on their own struggles, they are corralled back into the voting booth. This has been true for the

unions, the civil rights organization, the women's groups and even many so called left and revolutionary organizations. As a consequence, those engaged in these struggles ended up trading their dreams for a different society, for real social justice and economic equality, into the mere acceptance of a new set of politicians and temporary reforms.

This pamphlet explores the role the Democratic Party has played since its founding. We examine the interests the Democratic Party has represented. When we look at the history of the Democratic Party, we see a pattern of defending a system based on greed and exploitation – a capitalist system that maintains the class, racial and other divisions of this society.

### **The Democratic Party – Rooted in Slavery**

The Democratic Party was founded in the period after the American Revolution of 1776. One of the first major political struggles after the revolution was between the two groups of elites who had supported the revolution against Britain. The most powerful group was the large landowners from Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Their wealth came from the exploitation of Africans who had been ripped from their homes and brought to the colonies as slaves. Their plantations produced cotton and other crops, which were sold directly to Europe. They saw themselves like European nobles living on their estates with servants and imported European finery.

The other group of elites was wealthy merchants based in the North. Some of the merchants had profited from the slave trade but as they grew wealthier they searched for new areas for investment. They wanted a central government which could develop roads, waterways, and other infrastructure to get goods to domestic markets and industry. They also wanted a strong central bank which could set tariffs to protect their enterprises from competition with the more advanced European capitalists. Advocates of the merchants' interests formed the Federalist Party.

The slave owners opposed both setting up tariffs which would cut their direct connection to European markets and also a strong central government which might interfere in the slave trade. The slave owners organized around these fundamental goals called themselves the Democratic Party.

The conflict between these groups played out in Congress and in the elections for the presidency. In 1787, during the drafting of the Constitution, the two groups of elites made an agreement on how to govern the country. The agreement was written into the Constitution, as the "Three-Fifths Compromise" of 1787. The ruling class in the slave-states got proportional representation in the House of Representatives based on the white population plus three-fifths of the slave population. That meant that each slave gave the slave-owners of that state three-fifths more of a vote in the House of Representatives. The compromise reflected the importance of the slave economy and ultimately ensured the slave owners' control of the country. The Democrats were the ruling party for most of the early years of United States' history. Thirteen out of eighteen presidents before the Civil War were from the Democratic Party.

The Federalist Party and the Democratic Party were united in their goal of building up the

United States by conquest and genocide. Both agreed that the U.S. would come to rule the continent of North America by taking land from Mexico and from the Native Americans. They wanted the state to use the army to clear new territories for expansion. The Democratic Party candidate Andrew Jackson was elected in 1828. His first action was to support the “Indian Removal Act” which was passed in 1830. Under Jackson and the next Democratic Party President, Martin Van Buren, 70,000 Indians east of the Mississippi were terrorized and driven out of their lands by the military. In 1845 Democratic Party President James Polk took the United States into a war with Mexico to acquire the territory from Texas to California. That summer, in a leading Democratic political magazine, the editor John O'Sullivan proclaimed that it was the U.S.'s “manifest destiny to overspread the continent...” In other words, it is the so-called God-given right of the United States to dominate the continent of North America by force.

To maintain their hold over the government, the Democrats tried to play off the working class of the North against the Northern capitalists. They could oppose the capitalists' economic policies because they had very different interests. They presented themselves as defenders of the Northern workers and small-farmers against the wealthy merchants. Since the 1790s, tradesmen and farmers in the North had organized into political clubs to fight against the policies of their employers in the Federalist Party. In most cases, workers did not have the right to vote. There were restrictions on those who did not own a minimum amount of property, or could not afford to pay a substantial tax at the polls. These laws were designed to keep workers and poor farmers from having any power in politics.

The Democrats were able to co-opt some of the farmers and workers by supporting a few of their demands – for a ten-hour day, and for voting rights for the property less. Because of this, they could present themselves as champions of the poor in the North while they were brutally exploiting their slaves in the South. Not all workers were tricked into this alliance with the capitalists' slave-owning cousins. Between 1828 and 1834 workers built their own parties and ran worker-candidates in 61 cities, with some success. For the most part, however, the Democrats were able to control the Northern workers and farmers and incorporate their political activity into the Democratic Party.

### **The Civil War – The Democrats Fight to Maintain Slavery**

The Northern merchants continued to expand industrial production and this increased their need for transportation, access to raw materials, and protection from more powerful European markets. Slave owners watched as the harsh cotton-growing agriculture stripped their plantations of fertile soil. They started to look for new lands in the South and West. The question was posed: Would the new territories be a space for industry and markets to develop or for slave-based plantations? If Congress remained under the control of the Democrats, the slave owners would control the wealth of the country. Between the Northern industrialists and the Southern plantation-owners a deadly struggle was developing over which system of exploitation would rule in the new territories, and ultimately in the whole country.

The balance of forces was maintained, at least for the time being, because the capitalists in the North preferred to compromise with the Southern slave owners. Pushing a conflict would upset trade and force a confrontation that the Northern merchants feared losing. The

old Federalist Party had been reorganized in the 1830s as the Whig Party by Federalists who supported a policy of compromise with the Democrats. The Whigs opposed the Democrats in elections, criticized their policies, and argued that the new territories should be free from slavery but they accepted the South's dominance based on the Three-Fifths Compromise. Step by step they gave in to the Democrats' demands. For example, in 1850 Whig President Millard Fillmore pushed for California and the other territories taken from Mexico to be made non-slave states. In return for the support of the Democrats, he signed the Fugitive Slave Act promising the aid of the federal government in tracking down slaves that escaped to non-slave states. This meant that even in states where slavery was illegal, a slave was still a slave and could be arrested and sent back to the slave owner.

The institution of slavery did not go unchallenged. The first opponents of slavery were the slaves themselves. The system of slavery was constantly under threat of a generalized slave rebellion. In 1791, Haitian slaves overthrew the French colonial administration in Haiti and set up their own government. The thought of a similar generalized slave rebellion in the U.S. was an inspiration to the slaves and a nightmare haunting the slave owners. Many small-scale rebellions took place. The largest on record occurred in 1811 when nearly five hundred slaves at a plantation near New Orleans took up arms and marched to neighboring plantations attempting to launch a general slave rebellion. In 1822, a conspiracy for a major rebellion in South Carolina was organized by a freed slave named Denmark Vessey, but was uncovered before it was launched. In 1831, a slave named Nat Turner led a famous slave rebellion in Virginia, which set the whole South on guard against other rebellions. In all cases the rebellions were crushed by military and police, and the leaders and participants were executed.

There were also many people in the North who organized politically to fight for the abolition of slavery. These people were collectively known as the Abolitionist Movement. The abolitionists were led in the North by religious leaders such as the Quaker, William Lloyd Garrison, and ex-slaves, such as Frederick Douglass. The abolitionists produced a great amount of literature condemning slavery and arguing against it on moral grounds. Abolitionist ideas provided moral ammunition for those who opposed slavery. The Abolitionist Movement was never a mass force, but its criticism of the slave system threatened the Southern elite who feared anything that might encourage the slave rebellions. In 1830, the U.S. Postmaster General banned abolitionist literature from being sent to the South. Schoolteachers who were suspected of being abolitionists were expelled from Southern states.

The struggle between the North and the South became impossible to contain in spite of the Whig Party's compromises,. Bloody battles took place in the new territories. In 1855, Kansas became known as "Bleeding Kansas" because of bloody conflicts between pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers. In 1859, the abolitionist John Brown, who fought pro-slavery settlers in Kansas, led a raid on the military armory of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Brown hoped to take the armory and rally the local slaves in revolt. The attempt failed and John Brown was tried and executed, but the incident became a symbol of the conflict over slavery.

The conflicts outside of the political system led to a dramatic change in the two-party system. Many Northern capitalists were tired of compromise and wanted to weaken their

opponents by striking at the heart of their system. They formed a new political party which was thoroughly opposed to the Democrats, the Republican Party. The Republican Party, like the Whig Party, fought for the economic interests of the Northern capitalists. Unlike the Whigs however, the Republicans called for an end to the power of the Southern slaveholders to dominate the Federal Government. The Republicans started to use some of the abolitionists' moral condemnation of slavery in their rhetoric.

After the founding of the Republican Party, the conflict between Northern merchant elites and Southern Democrats came into the open. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln, a Republican and lawyer for the railroad companies, was elected President. Southern Democrats seceded from the Union when they saw that the Republicans were coming to power. Eleven Southern states from Texas to the Carolinas broke away to form the Confederate States of America. This began the Civil War. In fact, the Civil War took the shape of a revolution led by the capitalists of the North against the political domination of the slave-holders. In order to destroy the slaveholders' power, the Republicans would be driven to destroy the system of slavery which was its basis.

The Civil War raged for four years until it seemed that the North might be beaten by the South. The South had a more effective and experienced army. The most skilled army officers had been slave-owners from the South – an aristocratic plantation tradition. The North, however, had a weapon which it could use against the slave owners' power. There were four million African Americans living in the South under the Confederacy. The slaves already understood that the Civil War meant a shake-up for slavery. With the forces of repression off fighting the war, thousands of slaves were leaving the plantations as the Northern Army approached. This force of rebellious slaves could provide the forces the Northern capitalists needed to defeat the Southern slave owners.

In 1864, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves in the South. The Emancipation Proclamation was a military maneuver. It was a recognition that thousands of slaves had freed themselves and constituted a powerful force in the conflict. By giving the signal that Northern victory meant securing their freedom, the Republicans could use the newly freed slaves to shut down the Southern economy, cut the Confederate army's supply lines, and give the Union Army an overwhelming military advantage. Lincoln and the Republicans were by no means abolitionists. In fact, the Proclamation did not declare that all slaves would be freed, but only those in the states that had participated in the rebellion. This left slavery intact in some Northern states in the Union.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union Army prevailed and the South was occupied by Union troops. By the end of the war in 1865, Congress signed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, outlawing the old form of slavery in the whole United States. The power of the slave-owners organized in the Democratic Party was effectively broken.

### **The Party of Racism and Terror in the South**

President Lincoln was assassinated shortly after the war ended and power passed to his Vice President, the Northern Democrat, Andrew Johnson. Some Democrats in the North, like Johnson, rejected the Confederacy and supported the North during the war. They had

supported the North, but they were not politically committed to seeking a radical restructuring of the South and preferred to make an alliance with the defeated slave owners.

The Northern capitalists wanted to rebuild the South so that they could start shipping cotton and other agricultural products to Northern factories and cities. To do this they had to find people who could govern the South for them. President Johnson pardoned the ex-slave owners, returned their property, and gave them political control of the South. The ex-slaveholders immediately used their regained political power as well as their wealth and ownership of the land, to re-institute slavery in all but the name. They vetoed new state-constitutions which gave African Americans the right to vote. For a short period of time it seemed that the Southern plantation-owners would regain control of the South and the Civil War would begin again.

The Northern capitalists were unwilling to give political control back to the Southern plantation-owners whom they had just defeated. At first the Republicans' attempt to impeach Johnson failed by one vote in Congress. Then in the 1868 election, Republican Ulysses S. Grant, a general for the North in the Civil War, was elected president on a platform of radically restructuring the South to stop the ex-slave owners.

The South was still occupied by the Union Army. The North divided the South into military districts. Under Grant, anyone who had been involved in organizing or supporting the Confederacy in the Civil War was barred from holding office, this meant the majority of the plantation owners. Conventions were held to write new sets of laws and state constitutions. The Northern capitalists relied on the ex-slaves and poor white people to prevent the ex-slave owners from exerting political control. This period, known as "Reconstruction", is one of the most important democratic experiments in the history of the U.S.

For a brief period, the ruling class was suppressed, and it was up to the poor, farmers and workers, to set policy. What did they do? African Americans and white people from among the poor and working population were elected to the state governments. They cooperated because they had the same goals and interests. They passed laws to improve their lives. They set up some of the first public education in places like South Carolina. They built roads and bridges for small farmers. They ensured equal rights of white and African American citizens. The experiment of Reconstruction even reached to the federal level. In 1869, there were two African American members of the U.S. Senate and twenty Congressmen. Congress passed a Fourteenth Amendment which guaranteed equal rights for all races.

The plantation lands, however, were held by the federal government after the Civil War and returned to the ex-slave owners. The Republicans were willing to allow the ex-slaves to exercise new political rights, but they were not willing to overturn the property-relations in the South.

After the experience of Reconstruction, the Southern elite and their Democratic Party representatives made it clear to the North that they accepted the defeat of slavery and would not threaten the new order. Above all, the wealthy industrialists of the North wanted



the South to be a stable source of agricultural produce. The Southern elite had promised to ensure this and a deal was struck.

The Reconstruction democracy was vulnerable because it had a fatal weakness. Its existence rested on the protection afforded by the guns of the Union Army. It was the Union Army that had crushed the slaveholders and opened a political space for the participation of African Americans and poor white people.

The big landowners and their Democratic Party representatives used their wealth and authority to organize paramilitary groups like the Ku Klux Klan. During the 1860s and 1870s the KKK and other groups terrorized African Americans and poor white people who were politically organized. They beat those who resisted, burned their homes, and lynched people. The violence was designed to reverse the gains that poor people had made during Reconstruction and to use racism to drive a wedge between the races. Southern plantation owners still owned the land and rented it out to share-croppers in return for a big part of the produce. In 1877, the Union Army was withdrawn from the South, leaving the Reconstruction governments at the mercy of the Southern plantation owners.

The Democratic Party was re-organized by the plantation owners to take back the state and federal legislatures. The Democrats recaptured the Southern states and took their place alongside the Republicans in Congress. They passed many state-level laws in the South known collectively as the Jim Crow laws. The laws institutionalized the segregation that had been established by violence. The laws effectively stripped African Americans from having any voice in the political system. And the Supreme Court effectively reversed the Fourteenth Amendment in 1896, legalizing a system which denied the African American population equal rights to education, housing, and jobs turning an entire population into second-class citizens. The population of the South had been divided and conquered by force and the Democrats were re-integrated into the political system as the party of racism and terror. The most democratic experiment in U.S. history died at their hands.

### **From 1877-1914 – Keeping the Working Class Under Control**

Victory for the North in 1865 meant a victory for industrial capitalism. During the decades following the Civil War, industry expanded rapidly across the continent with the help of government subsidies, trade protection against foreign industry and development of transportation, particularly the railroad. The agricultural goods of the South were no longer shipped for manufacture in English factories. The resources of the South were at the disposal of Northern industry. American industrialists began to look for foreign markets to sell their goods. The Democrats became the loyal opposition to the Republican policies of industrial development and imperialism, and they continued to try to control the working class.

Most industrial capitalists supported the Republican Party which favored tariffs, internal development, and imperial wars – everything that could protect and extend their markets. The Democratic Party was able to represent another group of American capitalists engaged in overseas trading, banking, and railroads along with the traditional Southern elite. These capitalists, the Bourbon Democrats as they were known, opposed the Republicans because of the tariffs, high taxes, and imperial wars – everything which might upset or slow down

the day to day functioning of the market. They represented a different leadership team in case a majority of the capitalists wanted to change its strategy.

Many American farmers could not afford agricultural machinery and compete in the market. They were forced to sell their farms to the larger landowners and moved to the cities, and became workers in the rapidly expanding industrial sector. Alongside the American workers, many immigrants – people from Ireland, Italy, Eastern Europe, China and other countries – began to work in the factories, mines and on the railroads.

The cities swelled with this influx of population made up of both immigrants and natives. From 1860 to 1914 New York grew from 150,000 people to four million. Chicago went from 110,000 people to two million, and Philadelphia went from 650,000 people to one and a half million people. This created a large working class made up of both immigrants and native born Americans.

The Democrats controlled these new communities of industrial workers through the growth of “political machines”. The political machines traded votes for favors. If you wanted your garbage taken out, your streets swept, you had to pay with your vote. If you wanted a job or a house in a particular neighborhood, you had to make a deal with the local political boss. The Democratic machines in cities like Chicago, Boston and New York made sure that workers voted for the Democratic Party, or else they would make it difficult to receive housing and basic municipal services.

The Democrats played their most important role in responding to the challenge that the working class posed to the capitalists. With the growth of capitalist industry came the resistance of workers to their exploitation. Capitalism has an inherent tendency to break down as profits and investments by the capitalists sometimes result in production outstripping demand. This causes the whole system to come to a grinding halt. When goods are overproduced, people are thrown out of work and have no wages to buy the goods they produced. This traps the economy in a vicious cycle of layoffs and decreasing buying power. The periodic depressions meant hunger, insecurity, and misery for many workers.

The year 1873 marked the beginning of a deep economic depression. By 1877, the workers and farmers of the North were in rebellion. The owners of the railroads attempted to use the depression to reduce railway workers' wages. This touched off a huge railroad workers' strike. It was the biggest coordinated action that workers in the U.S. had ever taken till then - the Great Upheaval of 1877. The strike crossed the country from coast to coast at the speed of the railroad, pulling railway workers and other sections of the working class into action. The strike shut down whole cities as more workers joined. The Northern industrialists called on the Republican government to suppress the rebellious workers. The state repression against the strike was brutal. Federal troops, fresh from the South, were sent to suppress workers and re-assert the control of the bosses. Cities full of striking workers were besieged by government troops. One hundred people were killed in clashes with the police and army and a thousand were jailed.

The railway corporations backed down on the wage-cuts, but the government built up military defenses against the workers to protect the capitalists against future strikes.

National Guard barracks or armories were built in the major cities with fortified positions to fire on the workers. The strike shook American capitalists to the core.

Now that the workers had shown their power on a national scale it was essential for the capitalists, both North and South, to divert workers energies away from mass organizing. During the 1880s they criticized the Republicans for being the tools of big business. The Democrats were a minority in Congress and didn't hold the presidency, so they could blame the problems on the Republicans and seem like an alternative.

Many workers saw through the policies of the Democrats. Since the Great Upheaval of 1877, workers had begun organizing on a more political basis in their own interests. The Socialist Party of the U.S was formed in 1901 from a number of smaller revolutionary groups. Revolutionary workers had also begun to form radical unions, especially amongst unskilled immigrants and the poorer layers of the working class. The most important development was the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) founded in 1905 with the goal of organizing workers, not just for better wages and conditions but also for revolution. The IWW was an industrial union embracing all workers in any given industry regardless of their skill, race, or gender. By 1912 it had an estimated 50,000 industrial workers organized in its ranks, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. Between the Socialist Party and the IWW, a significant section of the working class was becoming conscious of its own interests.

### **World War I: The Democrats' War for Imperialism**

The economic expansion happening within the U.S. was also taking place in the economies of Europe. The European capitalist states were engaged in a world-scale competition for resources and markets. Each country expanded its military forces to protect its domain and increase its influence. Eventually the competition for control resulted into an open military conflict, World War I. Germany clashed with France and England as it made attempts to get into the markets of China and to acquire the raw materials of Africa. Germany and its allies went to war against France and Britain and their ally Russia. Before long much of Europe was in flames.

The American capitalists in 1912 preferred for the moment to stay out of the conflict in Europe. They were content to sell goods to both sides and watch their European competitors rip each other apart. The ruling class was anti-war because it could profit from "neutrality". The Republicans took a more pro-war stance and the seemingly anti-war stance of the Democrats resonated with the population which did not want to be dragged into the war. Most Americans saw World War I as a purely European affair - nothing Americans should be a part of. Democratic Party candidate for President Woodrow Wilson spoke against the entrance of the United States into World War I. He won a majority of the vote and was elected.

Wilson began his Presidency with the support of an anti-war public opinion and substantial portions of the capitalist class who didn't want to risk entering a war. By 1917, however, even the most cautious American capitalists had seen that the war in Europe would decide the future control of the world's resources. The United States had also entered yet another economic crisis, with industry overproducing and markets over-saturated with goods.

Spending tax-dollars on war production offered a way out of the economic crisis. Wilson and other politicians began making the case that the U.S. would enter the war to “make the world safe for democracy”. The Democratic Party shifted its policy. In 1918, even though Wilson was elected on an anti-war platform, he took the United States into World War I.

Millions of Americans actively opposed the war and mass demonstrations were held in the major cities. The revolutionaries had anticipated this change would occur and were at the center of organizing against the war. The Wilson administration met the anti-war movement with severe repression. The repression was directed at all dissent, making it a crime to criticize the war. Anyone involved in the revolutionary movement or associated with it was persecuted. Anti-war activists, Socialists, and anarchists were jailed. Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene Debs ran for office from jail opposing the War. More than two hundred revolutionaries were deported to Russia.

The repression struck major blows against the workers movement. In 1917, however, a new element was added to world politics. There was a workers' revolution in Russia. American workers involved in the Socialist Party and the IWW looked to the example of Russia for a way to fight on a political level with the goal of finally overthrowing the capitalists, their political parties and their state. Despite the intense repression, the most militant socialists and IWW activists started to group themselves together and by 1919 the U.S. Communist Party was formed. This party gathered some of the best organizers from the workers' movement. It represented a political voice which had the potential to finally break the hold that the Democrats had on the working class and the poor of the United States.

### **50,000 Americans Dead in World War I**

World War I raged across Europe until Germany and its allies were finally defeated in 1918. The United States came out of World War I with an advantage over Europe – the war had not taken place on its territory. However, 50,000 Americans had died and a whole generation had experienced the horrors of war.

Economically the war had improved the economy for the capitalists. They had profited from selling weapons and resources to both sides during the war, and had benefited from wartime spending. The value of stockholders' investments increased by 16.4 percent. Workers conditions remained poor in comparison. Wages in manufacturing only went up 1.4 percent. Deaths on the job averaged 25,000 per year and 100,000 were permanently disabled by accidents. During this time, workers, many of them demobilized soldiers, organized major strikes from Seattle to the Carolinas. The newly formed Communist Party was actively organizing workers, especially in the South which the labor movement hadn't reached before.

### **The Great Depression: Roosevelt and the Democrats Save Capitalism**

The year 1929 saw the onset of a major crisis in the economy, the Great Depression. The capitalist system, based on accelerating production again reached a barrier as markets overflowed with products. The economy crashed and millions were thrown out of work. People faced unemployment and hunger amidst enormous wealth. The breakdown of the system led to a great revolt by U.S. workers in the 1930s and 1940s. The political

representatives of the capitalists, both Democrats and Republicans were confronted with the challenge of both restarting the economy and keeping the population from challenging the capitalist system.

On the world scale, another threat to the system was looming in the form of another World War. Germany was re-arming and rebuilding its industry. German capitalism, with Adolph Hitler and the Nazis in control, threatened to make another grab for territory and challenge Europe and the U.S. for a place in the world market. Likewise the Japanese capitalists were rapidly developing industry and military ambition, threatening to become a regional power in Asia. The lines were being drawn between capitalist countries for another worldwide conflict over the world's resources. To secure a place for U.S. capitalism, the capitalists in the U.S. would need to mobilize the population of the U.S. to fight to secure a place for U.S. imperialism in the world.

The Great Depression hit with the Republicans still in office. The situation called for drastic measures and the Democrats were ideally placed to criticize the Republicans for their non-intervention in the U.S. economy and in the world. The Democrats ran Franklin D. Roosevelt as their candidate in 1932. Roosevelt was a wealthy Senator from New York who had served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Roosevelt was recast as a man of the people, ready to save the nation from greed and corruption. He campaigned under the slogan, "the New Deal", promising a change from previous administrations. The New Deal signaled a major change in the way the Democratic Party presented itself. It proposed major government spending in order to restart the economy, and instead of resisting the growing workers' movement, it proposed some reforms to pull workers out of severe poverty and unemployment. People responded to Roosevelt's appeal with overwhelming support in the elections.

People weren't just sitting and waiting for a savior to come rescue them. Workers started organizing and acting to meet their needs directly. People seized food from stores and warehouses to feed the hungry. Unemployed councils were organized all over the country with membership in the tens of thousands under the leadership of the Communist Party. Unemployed councils would block evictions, pressure authorities to keep workers gas and water turned on when they were late on the bills, and they fought discrimination against African Americans and immigrants. In Seattle fishermen caught fish and traded for firewood cut from the forests. Doctors, nurses, barbers, and seamstresses traded their skills for goods, and essentially showed that the only thing that wasn't working was the economy based on profit making.

In 1934, the working class launched a series of strikes involving a million and a half workers in San Francisco, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Toledo, Ohio. The three big strikes inspired workers all over the country. The workers' struggles forced Roosevelt and the Democrats to write legislation that appeared to respond to the demands of the movement. Roosevelt passed the Wagner Act of 1935 that set up the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Under the Wagner Act workers had the right to form unions and enter into collective bargaining through the NLRB. The bosses didn't want to have to deal with the unions, but preferred to have the government mediate if the unions couldn't be stopped outright. The NLRB was easier to control than striking workers feeling their power.

In 1936, a new sort of strike swept the country – the “sit-down” strike. The sit-downs were started by workers in Akron rubber plants who went on strike, but rather than leaving the factory, sat down at their machines and refused to leave. The workers essentially could hold the factory hostage in a sit-down making it impossible for the bosses to restart production with replacement workers (known as scabs). The largest sit-down strike took place from 1936-1937 at the GM plant in Flint Michigan. For 44 days the workers of Flint occupied the plants, shutting down the GM empire. After Flint, strikes flared across the country in record numbers. The strikes were so enormous that the Democratic Party and Roosevelt stepped in and set up mediation with the unions in order to get the workers to call off their strikes.

The strike waves weren't only a revolt against the bosses and their Great Depression. The workers were also revolting against the old structure of craft unions. Skilled workers had been organized since 1886 in the American Federation of Labor. The AFL avoided strikes and relied on the highly marketable skills of its membership to bargain for wages and rights. But the AFL saw the power of the strike wave and put together an industrial organizing committee headed by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers to organize new industrial unions. Lewis took this committee and formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations. It embraced all workers regardless of their level of skill or their race. This was the new union structure, industrial unionism, which the thousands of newly organized and militant workers claimed as their own. Organizers from the Communist Party played an important role in building the new CIO unions. Everywhere workers were winning contracts, building unions, and joining the CIO.

The CIO was built by the militancy of the workers, but it soon became a structure that could also contain them. The CIO began to tighten control of its membership, discouraging strikes and militancy. Lewis issued a statement to the bosses saying, "A CIO contract is adequate protection against sit-downs, lie-downs, or any other kind of strike."

There was no mass organization that could give the workers a different perspective. The Communist Party might have been able to organize a real opposition to the policies of Lewis and the CIO. It was by far the most important political organization in the working class. However, it had been dramatically affected by events in Russia. The Russian Revolution was a workers' revolution, but it had taken place in a poor underdeveloped country. The revolutionaries had assumed that the Russian example would spark other revolutions in the industrialized countries of Europe. Workers all over Europe made a number of revolutionary attempts but none succeeded. The exhausted Russian working class received no help and fell away from power. A layer of bureaucrats, led by Joseph Stalin, was left holding power. This grouping used its power to defend the narrow national interests of Russia as opposed to extending the revolution, and it began to increasingly take privileges of power and wealth for itself. Everywhere in the world, Stalin and his forces transformed the Communist Parties into tools of Russian foreign policy.

In the U.S., as in many countries, the bureaucracy took control of the Communist Party and transformed it from a party of workers' revolution to a tool of the bureaucracy. In 1935, the Communist Party came out in full support of the Democrats and Roosevelt because it hoped to make an alliance with the U.S. against the growing threat of Germany. The

Communist Party had led many of the key fights of the workers from the beginning of the strike wave. However, the Communist Party's policy of support for Lewis, Roosevelt and the Democrats during the period of the 1930s meant that there was no organized opposition to the Democrats' policies of co-opting the workers' struggle.

In 1939, World War II began when Germany sent its armies into neighboring Poland. France and Britain responded by declaring war. The Democrats under Roosevelt took up where Woodrow Wilson had left off and argued for using U.S. military might to secure influence in the world and protect American imperialism. The U.S. capitalists were already concerned about the rise of Japan and its invasion of China in 1937. Roosevelt pushed for a direct military intervention in Europe against Germany, and in Asia against Japan. In 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The direct attack on U.S. territory gave Roosevelt the means to rally the population for war.

In Europe, the entry of the U.S. along with the resistance of the Russian population to the German invasion defeated the German forces. After the war, the representatives of the victors, Stalin for Russia, Roosevelt for the U.S., and Winston Churchill for Britain, met at Yalta in the Ukraine to carve up the world markets. Russia was allowed to impose its control over Eastern Europe and the eastern part of Germany. The U.S. and Britain made agreements to divide the resource-rich areas in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The territories that Britain had dominated came under the control of the U.S. For example, Saudi Arabia received aid from the U.S. and in return, the ARAMCO oil corporation received the right to exploit the oil of the region. This began the U.S. support for the Saudi regime, a brutal religious monarchy that wouldn't last a week if the U.S. weren't supplying it with money, weapons, and the occasional military intervention.

Roosevelt also used World War II to pull the U.S. economy out of its tailspin. Roosevelt ordered a wage freeze for workers while U.S. industry expanded rapidly to meet the needs of the war. Union bureaucrats agreed to accept a "No-Strike" pledge supposedly to aid in the war effort. Where the workers refused to abide by the pledge, police and National Guard forces were called out. Before troops ever landed in Japan or Europe, Roosevelt ordered federal troops to crush strikes by workers in the U.S. The Taft-Hartley Act was passed allowing the government to forbid strikes.

Overall American capitalism boomed with the opening of enormous military markets and guaranteed profits bought and paid for by the state. At the height of wartime production, military contracts represented 34 percent of the GDP. The war economy set up in World War II has been maintained ever since, with an average of \$278 billion spent on the military per year since World War II. It is by maintaining a "permanent war economy" that capitalism in the U.S. has maintained a level of guaranteed profits without which it would be equally stuck in the same cycle of crises that caused the Great Depression.

The middle of the 20th century saw a major change in the social structure of the country. The racism that kept African Americans as second-class citizens was being shaken from the top and from below. A reform of the racist system was becoming necessary for the capitalists themselves. The industrial boom of the 1940s opened up new opportunities for African Americans to escape the racist South. During World War II, many African Americans moved out of the South to the industrial centers of the North and West to work in the war economy. The U.S. was criticized for its racism on the world scale, especially by

the Soviet Union. The U.S. tried to appear as a beacon of freedom and democracy in the world, especially where it attempted to extend its influence in Africa and Asia. The terrorized and disenfranchised Southern African American population was an embarrassment. Under Roosevelt, local Democratic Party politicians in the South maintained their racist order, but nationally the Party began promising reforms. The Democrats' promises and the new opportunities opening up resonated with African American's hopes, and, where African Americans could vote, they began to vote for the Democrats. Meanwhile, racism directed at Japanese Americans, however, reached brutal proportions. During the war, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 forcing 100,000 Japanese Americans into internment camps.

In addition, with these new hopes for change came the beginnings of resistance. In 1941, the Sleeping-Car Porters Union, led by A. Philip Randolph, threatened a massive march of African Americans on Washington to address this racism. In 1943, Harlem exploded in riots protesting substandard housing and job discrimination. This response to racism was hardly what the Democrats had in mind when they aimed to reform the system of segregation in the South.

Roosevelt died in 1945 while still in office. The presidency passed to his Vice President Harry S. Truman. The Democrats after Roosevelt were faced with a new set of challenges. They needed to maintain the wartime economic boom and secure the post-war world for exploitation by American corporations and also contain the rising tide of the Civil Rights Movement.

The New Deal and Roosevelt are talked about today in glowing terms. Roosevelt is remembered as a savior of the working class. But it was the working class who fought for and won some concessions. Politicians and pundits will say that what we need is another Roosevelt and another New Deal. Roosevelt's goal however was to save the system and secure the U.S. a leading role in the world against the other major capitalist powers.

### **Harry S. Truman, the First Cold War President**

President Truman maintained the imperialist policies established under Roosevelt. He also oversaw the end of World War II and began the Cold War, a struggle against the Soviet Union but also against domestic opposition and independence movements in the rest of the world.

During the final stages of World War II, Truman ordered atomic bombs to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The most horrible weapons known to humanity instantly killed 200,000 civilians. It was well known prior to the bombings that the Japanese were going to surrender, but Truman wanted to use the bomb to show the rest of the world that the U.S. was willing to use devastating force to keep control of the world's resources.

After World War II, Europe was weakened and the Soviet Union and the U.S. were left as the two major powers in the world. Even though the Soviet Union had degenerated, it still represented a force which stood outside of the bounds of capitalism. In spite of the betrayal of the working class by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the Soviet Union was at the very least a check against imperialism. The 40 years after World War II were marked by the struggle



between the U.S. and the Soviet Union known as the Cold War. After World War II, nationalist movements erupted in the former colonial countries of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, aimed at achieving national independence from the old colonial regimes. The Soviet Union supported them, hoping to weaken the imperialist countries by depriving them of access to markets and raw materials. The U.S. supported the old European colonial powers or intervened directly in countries like Korea, Vietnam and Afghanistan to control the population but also to fight the Soviet Union.

Domestically the Cold War was used as a means to attack the unions and the workers. The Communist Party was painted as a grave internal threat, even though the working class and its organizations had supported Roosevelt and the War, and done everything they could to shackle the workers to the Democratic Party with the help of the union bureaucracy. In 1949 over 140 leaders of the Communist Party were jailed under the Smith Act. The leading figure in these Cold War witch-hunts was Wisconsin Senator, Joseph McCarthy. Under McCarthy, the unions were purged of anyone who had ever been linked to the Communists or radical politics. Communists and radicals of all stripes were forced out of the same unions that they had played a major role in building. Thousands of workers were put on blacklists circulated amongst employers, which made it impossible for them to find work.

By 1949, the foreign policies of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party were almost identical. The difference between the parties was a matter of presentation and the illusions that the parties could draw on to get people's support. The Roosevelt era, however, left the Democrats with a pro-worker image (even though some Southern Democrats remained thoroughly committed to racist segregation). The Republicans appeared to be tougher on Communism.

The Cold War gave the Republicans a means to win the election of 1949 and reclaim the presidency. Dwight Eisenhower, the Republican candidate, used Cold War rhetoric to criticize the Democratic Party for being weak in defending Americans against the Soviet Union.

### **John F. Kennedy: A False Hope For Change**

John F. Kennedy was the next Democratic Party president after Truman. The Democrats under Kennedy argued that Eisenhower had let the United States fall behind the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Kennedy shared the same politics as his predecessors. During the 1950s, he had been one of the most rabid Cold War anti-communists, urging the government to push out and prosecute Communists as a domestic threat. Kennedy proposed that his foreign policy would be tougher on Communism than Eisenhower's. In 1961, Kennedy presided over the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by a Cuban exile army armed and organized by the U.S. He was also directly responsible for increasing U.S. involvement in Vietnam. His administration however was faced with a major movement of the African American population for civil rights.

Vietnam, once a French Colony, was one of many places in the world where people were rising up and attempting to throw off the domination of the imperialist countries. Every success by the oppressed gave inspiration to the people fighting elsewhere in the world.

The U.S. had supported the French since 1954 because they feared the consequences of a victory for the Vietnamese. The U.S. military maintained a string of military bases in China, the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. If Vietnam successfully kicked out the French it could spur these other countries to do the same to the U.S. military.

While the Democrats were fighting the Cold War, a major social movement was beginning to take hold of the African American population. African American veterans had seen a world in Europe where white people were not raised to be racist. They had seen the bigger picture and discovered that racism is not natural, and that societies could be different. The migration of African Americans to the cities, employment in industry, and the experience of the war had broadened African American's experience. They were going to make the changes they wanted themselves. The impact of these pressures were reflected in the 1954, "Brown vs. Board of Education" decision, in which the Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine that had been the legal basis of segregation since the 1890s. The Supreme Court did not set any sort of plan to desegregate the South, but African Americans themselves did. Protests and boycotts were launched which forced local governments and employers to address the problems of racism.

In 1960, students in North Carolina decided to sit-in and integrate the local lunch counter at Woolworth's. This form of direct action spread in a matter of weeks to fifteen cities in five Southern states. Over 3,600 of the participants were jailed for some time, but by sheer force of numbers they forced the lunch counters to accept integration. According to the Department of Justice, there were 1,412 demonstrations in only three months of 1963. That year civil rights organizers planned a march on Washington, in which 200,000 demonstrators came to the capital on the day. President Kennedy and other national leaders moved fast to welcome the Civil Rights Movement and pretend to be on the side of the demonstrators, despite their inaction while people were being beaten and murdered throughout the South.

### **Lyndon Johnson – The Vietnam War President**

Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. His Vice President, Lyndon Johnson took over. Johnson continued with Kennedy's foreign and domestic policies. His most important role was escalating the U.S. military presence in Vietnam to a full-scale war. Domestically he was confronted with the growing upsurge of the Civil Rights movement and the growth of a major anti-war movement.

In 1964, the Johnson Administration manufactured an excuse for a large-scale invasion by manipulating news of events happening in Vietnam. The Johnson administration claimed that U.S. ships had been attacked while patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin. Johnson portrayed this as an unprovoked attack on U.S. personnel. In fact those ships had been deep in North Vietnamese waters and the attack was a fabrication – it never happened. Johnson had wanted a reason to go to war and with the help of the news media, he sold the Gulf of Tonkin events to the American people as another Pearl Harbor. Congress almost unanimously passed a resolution to go to war on the basis of this lie. A draft was instituted to fill the ranks of the army and fight the war. In 1964, the U.S. sent 200,000 troops to Vietnam, 200,000 more in 1966, and by 1968 there were 500,000 U.S. troops fighting in Vietnam. The U.S. military policy was to terrorize the population into submission.

As the war on Vietnam escalated, the struggle of African Americans against racism intensified. In 1964 Civil Rights organizations called for massive demonstrations in Mississippi, the heart of the segregated South. During that summer, groups of young people went to Mississippi and faced extreme violence from local racists. Activists hoped that by throwing their bodies on the line they would bring attention to the crimes happening in the South. Three organizers were killed in cold blood with the help of the Philadelphia, Mississippi Police Department. As under Kennedy, no action on the part of Johnson to defend civil rights organizers was forthcoming.

The Federal government was trying to channel the movement into the legal system. In 1965, the Johnson Administration signed the Federal Voting Rights Act which ensured access to the ballot box, dismantling local laws designed to block African Americans from voting. If they could get people to believe that the Democrats represented what they wanted, they could keep them from acting for themselves.

Even while the Johnson administration was trying to placate the Civil Rights Movement by passing legislation, the ghettos were exploding with anger. In 1964, a demonstration in Harlem erupted in a riot that lasted for three days. In 1965, the Los Angeles ghetto of Watts exploded in an enormous rebellion for five days. In the summer of 1967, a wave of riots took place, the largest in Detroit and Newark. A Congressional inquiry reported eight major uprisings that summer as well as 33 riots and 123 “minor” disorders. African Americans had undergone a shift in consciousness through their struggle for their basic rights. The slogan changed from “Civil Rights” to “Black Power”. It was a new spirit - what the elite were not willing to give peacefully, people were ready to demand by force.

Many people in the United States were drawing connections between the Civil Rights struggle and the Vietnam War. In 1966, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, one of the most important Civil Rights organizations, issued a statement against the war and called for the troops to come home. In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., one of the chief spokesmen of the Civil Rights Movement came out against the Vietnam War, calling the U.S. “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.” The connection between, war, racism, capitalism, and U.S. foreign policy was becoming more and more obvious.

The most important resistance took place in the military. Many soldiers had been involved in the Civil Rights struggle and had been politicized. Why should they fight the Vietnamese when the people who were oppressing them were back in the United States? Soldiers circulated underground newspapers throughout the front. They began refusing to fight. Angry soldiers rolled grenades into the tents of their commanding officers. Thousands deserted the army. In 1967 alone, 47,000 soldiers were reported “missing in action”. Young men who had been drafted began refusing to enlist. In 1966, there were 380 people prosecuted for avoiding the draft. By the end of the sixties, the number of young men refusing to serve was 33,960. Between 50,000 and 100,000 draftees fled to Canada or Europe to escape being sent to Vietnam.

### **1968 – A Year of Struggles**

The year 1968 presented a crisis for the ruling class and the Democratic Party. The North

Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive on January 30th, the Vietnamese New Year. Vietnamese forces struck at the U.S. army in over a hundred cities and launched a major assault on the capital of Saigon. At the height of the attack the National Liberation Front flag flew over the U.S. embassy in Saigon. The attack was a deep shock to the American public who were growing increasingly opposed to the war. The politicians were telling them that it was nearly over and the U.S. was nearing victory. The Tet Offensive showed that this was a lie.

Then Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April. Immediately the inner cities of the United States erupted with anger. Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Newark, Washington, D.C. and many other cities were in flames as people took out their anger. By the end of the summer, 125 different American cities had seen urban rebellions. The local police forces could not be relied upon to contain the rebellions and National Guard troops were flown in from the South and the Midwest.

The Democrats struggled to react to these major challenges to their authority. A section of the party began to see the war as too costly to maintain. Major newspapers and TV networks began to reflect their corporate owners' questioning of the war, becoming critical of the government policy. The Civil Rights movement, Black Power, and the urban rebellions made capitalists understand they could no longer rely on the population to fight a war abroad and they also faced a growing resistance at home. Still, a good deal was invested in the war and sections of the capitalist class refused to accept defeat in Vietnam and were unwilling to make concessions to the Black Movement.

The year 1968 was an also election year. The Democratic primaries became an electoral contest for those who wanted to change policy, and those who wanted to stay the course. There were two candidates who came out against the war: the little-known Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, and the much more famous Senator Robert F. Kennedy (JFK's brother) of New York. Both Kennedy and McCarthy had served long terms in various governmental positions. McCarthy was a Senator on the fringes of the Democratic Party. He had been a consistent critic of the Vietnam War. As the election of 1968 drew closer, he gained popularity, reflected in the New Hampshire Primary, where he received 42 percent of the vote, as opposed to Johnson's 49 percent. His candidacy challenged the Democratic Party to reconsider its attitude towards the Anti-War Movement.

Kennedy on the other hand was part of the wealthy Kennedy family, had served as Attorney General during his brother's administration, and later as a Senator from New York. He had not uttered a word of opposition to the Vietnam War until after the New Hampshire primary. After the New Hampshire primary, Kennedy came out against the war. The usual arguments were made to excuse his late-coming anti-war convictions, that he was being "pragmatic" and was only trying to stay "electable" before 1968.

The introduction of anti-war candidates split the Democratic Party. Some politicians were impressed with McCarthy and Kennedy's popular stance on the war and wanted a shift in policy but a substantial portion of the Party apparatus, especially its local city and state government officials, supported Johnson and continuing the war. Many Southern Democratic politicians broke away and supported third party candidate George Wallace, the militantly racist governor of Alabama. With the party split three ways, and his

popularity falling in opinion polls, Lyndon Johnson finally appeared on television and announced that he would not run in the election.

This election was a major focus, even a distraction for some of the people who had been engaged in the social movements in the 1960s. On the one hand they were excited to see their views reflected by establishment politicians, McCarthy and Kennedy. It was amazing for people in the movement to see Lyndon Johnson decline to run because of the pressure against him and the war. People felt that they were truly changing things because the politicians were changing their tune. They failed to see that the emergence of anti-war candidates was yet another attempt by the Democrats to co-opt people's energies. People were being fooled yet again by the same old promise of politicians who are “really” on their side. Then, in May, Robert F. Kennedy who had won the California primary over Eugene McCarthy was shot and killed. For many people this was very demoralizing because of the amount of energy and hope that had been invested in Kennedy.

The pro-war section of the Democratic Party dominated the Chicago Democratic National Convention in August. Anti-war protests outside of the convention drew thousands of protesters. Chicago's Democratic Party Mayor Daley ordered police to meet the protesters with force. The convention was surrounded by thousands of police, National Guard, and barbed wire fences. Despite police violence the protests raged outside the convention for eight days. Inside the convention, the pro-war candidate, Lyndon Johnson's Vice President Hubert Humphrey, won almost three times as many votes as the anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy. Much like today, the Democratic Party candidate was not selected by popular vote alone. Democratic Party bosses were able to cast deciding votes. The real decision makers in the Democratic Party – the corporate donors and professional politicians – had decided that without Kennedy they would not even try to appeal to the anti-war sentiment. The pro-war Hubert Humphrey became the candidate of the Democratic Party.

The election of 1968 saw two pro-war candidates running against each other – Hubert Humphrey and Republican Richard Nixon. Humphrey alienated people who were against the war and did nothing to significantly distinguish himself from his opponent. He was identified in the public mind with Lyndon Johnson. Nixon played into the fear of many Americans who did not understand the urban rebellions in the inner cities and the U.S. losses in Vietnam. Nixon won with a campaign appealing to this “Silent Majority” for a return to normalcy and order. Nixon also suggested that he had a plan to end the Vietnam War.

### **After 1968: The Democrats in Disarray**

The Democrats were in complete retreat with the Party split internally. In 1972, the Kennedy and McCarthy supporters won the nomination for the Democratic Party ticket supporting a South Dakota Senator, George McGovern. McGovern promised an immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam as well as a decrease in war spending. Meanwhile, the rest of the Democratic Party establishment not only opposed McGovern, they actively campaigned against him after he was nominated. The result was a schizophrenic campaign in which leading Democrats campaigned against the Democratic Party candidate.

People were presented with no clear alternative in the election of 1972. The Democrats

were split and in chaos. For many people they no longer seemed like an alternative. Voter turnout in the election was only 55.2 percent of the electorate despite the charged political atmosphere. Nixon was elected again by a wide majority, but only of those who bothered to vote.

People did not stop resisting. In fact people became more desperate to find ways to oppose the war machine which seemed to carry on regardless of protests. This opposition took on many forms, both collective and individual. Veterans formed the group Vietnam Veterans Against the War and held protests of returned soldiers in front of the White House. Daniel Ellsberg, a top-level employee of the Pentagon, leaked secret documents known as the Pentagon Papers to the press. Women, many who had been active in the Civil Rights and anti-war movements, began to organize to address women's issues. This movement, the Feminist Movement, fought for a change in the way women were treated in the culture. The movement demanded equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities in education, and free childcare.

### **The Carter Administration**

Jimmy Carter became president when there was a deep mistrust of the government and the entire electoral system. Many people felt that the government was part of the problem and had no concern for ordinary people. The population had just been through two major social movements (the Civil Rights and the Anti-War Movement), a rebellion within the army, followed by movements for women's rights, gay rights, prisoner's rights, American Indian and environmental movements. In the previous decade, many people proved to themselves that if they wanted things to change, they had to rely on their own actions, not the politicians. Coupled with this newly established self-confidence was a complete mistrust in the entire government, born from lies about Vietnam, assassinations and imprisonment of political activists, and the Watergate scandal with President Nixon, which led to his resignation. In the 1976 election, only 53 percent of eligible voters even bothered to vote. Carter was elected by only 50 percent of those that voted – that totals only 25 percent of the eligible voting population. He was hardly seen as a solution.

In his campaign for president, Carter tried to regain the trust of the disillusioned public through pretending to share their political views. Even though Carter had supported the Vietnam War until it ended, he tried to convince people he had been against the war. He promised to cut the military budget, provide health care for the poor, and diminish the inequities of wealth between the African American and white populations. He attempted to gain people's respect through appearing as an ordinary, hardworking farmer from the South. In reality, Carter was a millionaire peanut grower who inherited the land from his father. When he was elected, Carter even made a few token appointments within his administration to keep the charade going. He appointed an African American woman, Patricia Harris, as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement, Andrew Young, as ambassador to the United Nations, and a former anti-war activist to head up a new department in charge of the Peace Corps.

But his other appointees were a continuation of the past. His National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and his Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, were strong supporters of the Vietnam War, and his Secretary of Energy, James Schlesinger, was

Secretary of Defense under Nixon, and supported a continued increase in the military budget. The majority of Carter's other appointees had strong connections to the corporate elite, including the Trilateral Commission, an international grouping of major capitalists, like David Rockefeller, and foreign policy experts, like Brzezinski. The main purpose of this group was to improve international military and economic strategies of emerging U.S. multinational companies. This group chose to support Carter in the election because they believed that, following the Watergate scandal with Nixon, a Republican would not be elected.

### **Carter's Foreign Policy**

Carter has been portrayed in the media as an international humanitarian activist. He even won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002. When we look at the actual foreign policy record of Carter's presidency, however, we see the exact opposite of humanitarianism. We see Carter's unflinching support of U.S. corporate interests, a consistent support of brutal dictators, and the policy of crushing popular movements.

In his State of the Union address of 1980, Carter gave the following warning:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

The Carter Doctrine was a warning to the rest of the world that the U.S. would not hesitate to defend its oil interests in the Middle East with military force. The Carter Doctrine simply summed up what had been carried out by U.S. imperialism for about 100 years, and modeled the kind of foreign policy that was maintained throughout the Carter administration:

**Suharto Dictatorship** Just before President Carter took office, the Indonesian military, under the dictator General Suharto, invaded the small island of East Timor, and within the next few years, slaughtered 200,000 people, about one third of the population. The Carter administration gave uncritical support to Suharto, and even increased military aid to his government by 80 percent, amounting to several hundreds of millions of dollars. Without U.S. aid, Suharto's military may have run out of weapons and been defeated by the East Timorese resistance. The U.S. did not want this to happen because Suharto's government was extremely obedient to U.S. economic interests. During the presidency of Richard Nixon, encouraged by the Ford Foundation, the U.S. supported the rise to power of General Suharto through a military coup against a nationalist movement in Indonesia. As soon as Suharto was in power, he practically handed over the Indonesian economy and resources (primarily oil, ore and timber) to U.S. corporations. The Carter administration did not hesitate to come to the military aid of this brutal tyrant.

**Support for Mobutu** In the central African country of Zaire, through a coup in 1965, President Mobutu Sese Seko came to power. His regime was as brutal as they come. He built a personal fortune while the country was sinking further into economic debt and collapse. He carried out public hangings and torture of suspected opponents. Mobutu would sometimes sentence members of the government to death, have them tortured, and

then he would pardon their sentence and reappoint them to a position in the government, but this time with the confidence they wouldn't dare betray him. This was his method of assuring loyalty.

Publicly, the Carter administration tried to distance itself from Mobutu's government, but actually it was a major supporter. The majority of aid to sub-Saharan Africa under Carter, went to Mobutu. And in 1977, an uprising against Mobutu broke out in the southern province of Shaba. The Carter administration, as well as France and Belgium, responded immediately with two million dollars in military supplies. The U.S. gave permission to Moroccan soldiers, armed with U.S. weaponry, to fly into Zaire and aid Mobutu in crushing the uprising. And soon afterwards, newspapers reported that behind the scenes, the CIA was recruiting mercenaries to send to Zaire to support Mobutu's weak military.

**Dictatorships Around the World** Carter's administration aided military death squads in El Salvador responsible for the murder of thousands of people who resisted the land reforms in the country which kicked thousands of peasants off their land and handed it over to U.S. agricultural companies. It gave continued support to the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, responsible for the rape, torture and murder of thousands of Nicaraguans. And in order to maintain U.S. military bases and economic investment in the Philippines, the Carter administration continued the U.S. military aid of the previous decade to the brutal dictator of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos. Under the Carter administration, the U.S. continuously vetoed U.N. resolutions to impose sanctions on the apartheid government of South Africa. The Carter administration also gave consistent military support to the brutal Shah of Iran, who guaranteed U.S. companies access to Iranian oil. Under the Shah, SAVAK, Iran's police force trained by the CIA, tortured and murdered thousands of Iranians. Their brutality included torture by electric shock, whipping, beating, inserting broken glass and pouring boiling water into the rectum, tying weights to testicles, and ripping out teeth. In short, Carter's administration represents an undeniable continuation of the military dominance and brutality of previous administrations.

### **The Camp David Lies**

Another part of Carter's false legacy is the supposed Pro-Palestine agenda he tried to push during the Camp David Accords of 1978. The Camp David Accords of 1978, signed between Israel and Egypt, has been presented as a major concession by Israel to the people living in the occupied territories of Palestine. The agreement has been represented as providing the Palestinian people with their own state. For signing the treaty, Egypt received billions of dollars in military aid from the U.S. But the so-called Palestinian state was nothing more than small, isolated plots of land connected through Israeli military checkpoints. In effect, the Camp David Accords supported the expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, and it conceded nothing to Palestinians except further occupation.

### **The Carter Economy: Handouts to Corporations and Attacks on Workers and the Poor**

During his administration, a snapshot of the economy accurately reflects the interests Carter supported. The top one percent of the country had more than 33 percent of the



wealth. The top ten percent of the population had more than 30 times the bottom ten percent of the population. And 83 percent of all corporate stock was owned by only five percent of the population. While, for example, Exxon Mobil's profits were increasing over 56 percent per year, to over four billion dollars, and their CEO was making over \$830,000 per year. Over ten million children had no health care. Eighteen million children had never been able to see a dentist. The prices of food and necessities were rising faster than workers' wages, with an inflation rate of 18 percent by 1980. Official levels of unemployment were between six and eight percent, but for African Americans it was between 20-30 percent.

Carter was elected promising to cut the U.S. military budget and decrease arms sales around the world. But during his term in office, he did neither. The U.S. remained the leading arms dealer throughout the world, maintaining the export of around nine and a half billion dollars per year in arms. And in his first budget proposal to Congress, Carter increased the military budget by ten billion dollars, spending one trillion dollars on the military for the next five years. He also denied \$25 million earmarked for poor schoolchildren. Carter also supported attacks on women's access to abortion. In 1976, he signed the Hyde Amendment into law. This prohibited the use of federal funding (through Medicaid) for poor women to have abortions. When criticized for the blatant unfairness of the law, he said: "Well, as you know, there are many things in life that are not fair, that wealthy people can afford and poor people cannot." He also passed tax legislation that increased the taxes on the poorest 50 percent of the population and gave about 18 billion dollars in reductions to corporations and extremely wealthy individuals. And Carter began the deregulation of key industries in the U.S., trucking, shipping, and airlines. Deregulation meant the lifting of government regulations that could set price limits for consumers and regulate the formation of monopolies. Carter eliminated these regulations and paved the way for the rapid formation of larger monopolies in these industries, with more of the profits going to fewer corporations.

Throughout his presidency, Carter supported attacks on workers in defense of corporations. Between 1977 and 1978, over 165,000 coal miners went on strike across the Appalachian Mountains. Coal companies were trying to force a new contract on workers that would make them pay for health benefits, and would impose massive layoffs, which would result in even more dangerous conditions with fewer workers operating the mines. The company was also trying to force workers to give up their right to strike over many issues, and allow the company to fire workers who were known organizers of wildcat strikes, which had been growing as workers defended themselves against increasingly unsafe conditions. Towards the end of the strike, Carter threatened the striking workers with the Taft-Hartley Act. This authorized the government to send in federal troops to break the strike. Ten days after Carter's threat to send in federal troops, the coal miners' union, the UMW, pushed the striking miners to accept the harsh contract, which was a major setback, not just for the miners but for the whole U.S. working class.

Carter also laid the foundation for the crushing of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), the union of about 17,000 air traffic controllers. Throughout the 70's, these workers faced concessions, like understaffing, forced overtime, and pay cuts, but they were a well-organized workforce that was able to resist these cuts going further. The government wanted to break the union and impose massive paycuts. This was finally

achieved in 1981 when President Reagan ordered the firing of over 11,000 of 17,000 workers and the elimination of the PATCO union. But it was Carter who paved the way. One year before the contract was up, Carter ordered the formation of what was called a “Management Strike Contingency Force.” Its goal was to train replacement workers (scabs), and put pressure on the most militant workers in the union before any strike broke out. So, when Reagan acted in 1981 to break the union, the scabs were already trained and on-hand, ready to take over the jobs of the 17,000 workers. So when we think about Reagan and the crushing of PATCO, we should really be thinking about Carter too.

Jimmy Carter was a true representative of the Democratic Party – an avid defender of the ruling elite of this country and a staunch opponent of working and poor people.

### **The Presidency of Bill Clinton**

With the endless war and economic hardships of the arrogant, openly scandalous, and reactionary Bush administration of 2000-2008, the Clinton administration has mysteriously developed a positive legacy. It has become common for some people to think of the Clinton years as ones that were opposite in every possible way to the Bush years. People remember Clinton for fixing the budget, keeping employment up, prioritizing education, assisting African Americans – it seems the only flaw the media and the public pin on Clinton is his dishonesty during the scandal with his white house aide, Monica Lewinsky.

What the records show, however, is that the Clinton administration consistently carried out a pro-business economic agenda and an aggressive imperialist foreign policy, one in which corporate interests were at the top of the list. Rather than representing something new, Clinton was a continuation of the same effort to channel more wealth away from the working class and poor and into the pockets of corporations.

### **Clinton’s Campaign**

Bill Clinton was elected and re-elected with under 60 percent of the eligible voters participating – that’s over 40 percent deciding not to vote at all. In both elections, he was elected by less than 50 percent of those who voted. He too was hardly a popular president.

In his 1992 election campaign, he tried to appear as an outsider to Washington, someone who could bring a new perspective to old problems. He criticized other candidates for being indebted to corporate interests through campaign contributions. Attempting to maintain this outsider façade, he pledged not to take any Political Action Committee (PAC) money during the 1992 primaries. PACs are loosely defined, informal organizations set up to funnel money into individual campaigns – they can be directly linked to specific corporations, wealthy individuals, lobbying groups. Clinton’s decision to avoid PAC money in the primary was simply a campaign strategy to try to distance himself from the other Democratic nominees.

In fact, months before the first primary took place, Clinton had already raised more money than any of his Democratic rivals because early-on his campaign heavily solicited Wall Street, Hollywood, the high-tech companies, telephone companies, computer companies, media conglomerates, and many others. His outsider image was nothing more than an

election strategy based on a lie, as most election strategies are.

Clinton wasn't an outsider to Washington or big business. More than half of his campaign advisers were regulars in Washington, many of them with fulltime jobs working for foreign corporations and governments, the tobacco industry, insurance companies, oil and gas firms, investment banks and other corporate interests. As Governor of Arkansas, Clinton developed strong relationships with the elite clique of big businessmen and landlords ruling Arkansas. One other big supporter was Tyson Foods, the largest company in Arkansas, ranked 110 on the Fortune 500 list in 1995. During his 1992 presidential campaign, a spokesman for Martin Marietta Corporation (an enormous weapons manufacturing company) expressed Clinton's relationship with corporations best: "I think the Democrats are moving more toward business and business is moving more toward the Democrats." Clinton was no outsider to Washington or Big Business; he was in fact their tested and approved servant.

### **Balancing the Budget**

When Clinton came to office there was already a four trillion dollar deficit racked up under the Carter, Reagan and Bush administrations primarily from massive increases in government spending. Clinton promised to eliminate this deficit. Two obvious solutions would be to either massively cut military spending, which caused the bulk of the deficit, or increase taxes to the super-rich, the top one percent, the only group whose wealth had been steadily rising while everyone else's decreased. Instead, the Clinton administration decided to impose massive cuts in social services to the poorest and most vulnerable layers of the population, and impose no new taxes for the super-rich. The military budget was reduced, but it was a much smaller reduction than expected.

Before Clinton came into office, the Soviet Union had officially collapsed, ending the decades-long Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Thus, the pretext for maintaining such high levels of military spending no longer existed. In fact, the previous administration of George H.W. Bush, under what was called a "Peace Dividend," had begun to reduce military spending under the rationale that the Cold War was coming to an end. The Bush administration cut military spending by about 17 percent by the end of its term.

Under the Clinton administration, there was good reason to expect a significant reduction in military spending. At the time, there were projections of large increases to education, urban renewal, and the much needed social programs. Instead, by the end of Clinton's second term, military spending was only reduced by seven percent. Most of the cuts came through closing obsolete military bases, retiring old Navy ships, and decreasing the overall number of active troops. Beyond these cuts, military spending stayed at Cold War levels. These reductions were a far cry from significantly reducing military spending. In fact, more of the military budget became concentrated in the corporate sector responsible for armaments production.

The flipside to this small "Peace Dividend" was what could be called a "War Dividend." Under Clinton, the U.S. became the world's unprecedented, biggest arms dealer, selling more weapons than the rest of the nations combined. This rapid increase came from the

U.S. replacing the Soviet Union as an arms dealer to many nations. Under Clinton, a ban on sales of advanced weaponry to South America was lifted. For the first time, U.S. corporations were producing more arms for other countries than they were producing for the Pentagon. This was a clear handout to weapons manufacturers and a devastating blow to poor people around the world who had to live under the brutal dictatorships that received these weapons.

Another component of Clinton's strategy for reducing the four trillion dollar deficit was to funnel money away from the poor. Clinton cut over five billion dollars to education in 1997. Health care was denied to ten and a half million uninsured children. Housing assistance programs, which were cut under Reagan and Bush, were eliminated under Clinton.

The biggest attack on the poor was Clinton's virtual elimination of welfare. These cuts occurred on many levels. Clinton cut welfare benefits to illegal and legal immigrants. Over one million legal immigrants received letters explaining that their food stamps and financial assistance would be cut off in a few months unless they became citizens. The condition of becoming citizens was just a ruse because it took longer than a few months to become a citizen.

The bulk of the cuts to welfare came under the law with one of those all too familiar hypocritical titles: "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996." This bill cut off families' benefits after two years, reduced lifetime benefits to only three years, and cut food stamps to people without children to only three total months in any three-year period. These cuts alone eliminated over ten billion dollars per year in social spending.

The official reasoning for pushing millions of the poorest of the population into further desperation was to provide them with employment, and eliminate their dependency on the government for assistance. The administration argued that once off welfare, people would be pushed to find jobs. This was commonly known as the "welfare to work" program: that is, get off of welfare and go to work. But this logic was completely backwards. People weren't unemployed and underemployed because they were on welfare – they were on welfare because they were unemployed and underemployed. There weren't enough jobs to employ all of the people who needed them, and the majority of those who did have jobs saw their incomes decrease every year since the 1970's. Every time there were job openings more people applied than would be hired. In New York, over 100,000 people applied for 2000 job openings at the Sanitation Department. In Chicago, over 7,000 people showed up for 550 jobs at a restaurant chain. Overall, there was very little transition from welfare into employment. There was only a transition from poverty to even greater poverty.

Clinton did eventually balance the budget. But he did so by forcing millions of people into desperate poverty.

### **Send the Poor to Prison**

Some may wonder what happened to the people who were eventually kicked off of welfare and couldn't find jobs. Unable to find work, with no money to live, many turned to petty

crime. And with increases in police forces and new harsh sentencing laws, many of the poor ended up in prison.

Under Clinton, the prison population skyrocketed, growing larger than the previous twelve years of Republican administrations combined. Clinton administered the largest increase in the prison population in U.S. history. Reagan ended his second term with approximately 49,000 federal prisoners. Clinton ended his second term with over 147,000 new federal prisoners, over 500,000 new state prisoners, about two million people behind bars, and over 4.5 million people in the parole system. Over 70 percent of these new prisoners came from extremely poor neighborhoods. Under Clinton, for the first time, more money was being spent for prison construction than education. In 1996, \$2.6 billion was spent on prison construction and only \$2.5 billion on the construction of universities. Under Clinton, for the first time, prison construction became a full-blown industry, with private companies responsible for construction, providing guards, food and clothing.

The rapid growth of prisons and the number of inmates are direct consequences of Clinton's cuts to social services.

### **Prelude to the USA PATRIOT Act**

Before the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, there was the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. This bill was signed into law by Clinton following the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. It eliminated habeas corpus for those suspected of being terrorists, which meant people could be arrested and imprisoned without any evidence being produced. Individuals could not challenge the accusation of being a terrorist because the law allowed the state to use secret evidence against the individual, evidence they would never have to produce or explain. The law also expanded the definition of terrorism to make it easier for the government to charge a person with being a terrorist. Together, these changes make it almost impossible to defend against the charges of being a terrorist.

The law also imposed new statutes of limitations for all inmates, regardless of their crimes, on when they can appeal their convictions. It limited appeals on death penalty convictions to six months, and appeals to all other convictions to one year. This means that after this time, anyone convicted could no longer file an appeal. This was a huge blow to many prisoners on death row, who are wrongly convicted and need a lot more than six months to put together their appeal. At the same time, it also prevented appeals that were based on new evidence.

Even though only U.S. citizens were convicted of the Oklahoma City bombing, the law vastly expanded the ability of the state to deport immigrants. It allowed the deportation of any immigrant ever convicted of a crime, regardless of how long ago or how serious the crime was. Even legal permanent residents who had married U.S. citizens were not exempt from the deportation.

It was the Clinton administration that paved the way for the severe stripping away of civil liberties after 2001.

### **NAFTA and Corporate Plunder Around the World**

One reason for the rising unemployment was because many industries in the U.S. were closing down factories, chasing larger profit margins through employing cheaper labor in poorer countries around the world. U.S. administrations have had a consistent policy of facilitating the entry of U.S. corporations into other countries, to both exploit the resources and wealth as well as expand export markets without restrictions. The Clinton administration's NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) serves as an example of how these policies work.

NAFTA practically removed all restrictions for U.S. corporations and products to enter Canada and Mexico. Overall, NAFTA increased unemployment both in the U.S. and Mexico, and pushed millions more Mexicans into despair.

One goal of NAFTA was to crush Mexico's agricultural market. This mechanism can be seen through the example of corn. Before NAFTA, corn (or maize) was the largest crop in Mexico and the corn industry was one of the biggest sources of Mexican employment. But when NAFTA eliminated trade restrictions and tariffs with Mexico, U.S. agribusinesses flooded Mexico with corn exports, sold at artificially low prices because U.S. agribusinesses receive farming subsidies from the U.S. government. This influx of artificially cheap corn wiped out most of Mexico's small farmers because they couldn't compete with such low prices. Mexico quickly turned from a country that produced its own corn into a country that imported corn. Over one million farmers and workers connected to agriculture soon lost their source of income.

The overall result of NAFTA was millions of poor farmers and workers leaving the land in search of a livelihood. Many farmers were forcibly kicked off by the Mexican Army. Many of these plots of land were eventually sold off to U.S. companies for further agricultural development. People who had farmed the lands for centuries were kicked off only to come back to work on the same land for a U.S. company, at poverty level wages.

As part of NAFTA, U.S. corporations set up factories throughout the country, and even created a new hub of factories along the U.S.-Mexico border, known as *maquiladoras*. These areas are like extensions of U.S. territory because they have no tariffs for products brought into the U.S. As millions were being kicked off of the land, the number of unemployed in Mexico skyrocketed, and the number of people desperately in need of wages increased. U.S. corporations profited from this desperation by hiring these workers for extremely low wages. The Mexican government enforces very minimal labor legislation, safety regulations, wage standards, and environmental restrictions. U.S. corporations took advantage of these policies, and they were backed by the Mexican state, with its army and police to impose harsh working conditions.

One obvious result of NAFTA was an increase in the emigration of Mexico's population. With no land left to live on, no crops to sell, and intense competition for jobs in new U.S. factories in Mexico, many Mexicans fled the country looking for new work. Most of them, of course, headed to the U.S. The Clinton administration was well aware that this would happen as soon as NAFTA took shape. This is why, just a few months after the passage of NAFTA, Clinton passed the law called "Operation Gatekeeper." This massively increased the militarization at the border between the U.S. and Mexico. It doubled the budget of the

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to \$800 million, and also doubled the number of border agents, and the length of border fence, and tripled the number of underground sensors and surveillance equipment.

One year after NAFTA was passed, Clinton helped to establish the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO establishes various rules over the trade relations between countries. These rules, however, benefit the members of the WTO that hold the most sway. The U.S. uses the WTO as a way to enforce trade and economic policies that benefit U.S. corporations. This is a process whereby U.S. corporations take over the economies of foreign countries. The Clinton administration's policy under NAFTA was just an example of U.S. international economic policy in general. Practically every part of the so-called developing world has been forced to surrender its economy to rules that benefit U.S. corporate interests. And the creation of the WTO made it even easier for U.S. corporations to carry out these policies.

### **Foreign Policy as Usual – Destruction, Devastation, Domination**

Together we must also confront the new hazards of chemical and biological weapons, and the outlaw states, terrorists and organized criminals seeking to acquire them. Saddam Hussein has spent the better part of this decade, and much of his nation's wealth, not on providing for the Iraqi people, but on developing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the missiles to deliver them...I know I speak for everyone in this chamber, Republicans and Democrats, when I say to Saddam Hussein, "You cannot defy the will of the world," and when I say to him, "You have used weapons of mass destruction before; we are determined to deny you the capacity to use them again."

This is not a quotation from George W. Bush before the U.S. waged war on Iraq a second time in March of 2003. This is from Bill Clinton's State of the Union speech in 1998.

Clinton became president immediately following the first Gulf War in 1991. The invasion lasted six weeks; about two thousand tons of bombs were dropped per day, and over 250,000 people were killed – Iraq was left in ruins. Throughout its two terms, the Clinton administration maintained economic sanctions against the devastated country. It was clear early-on that the sanctions – which restricted trade with Iraq, banned many important chemicals used in basic medicines and water treatment – were making the lives of the majority of the deeply impoverished population even worse. After twelve years of sanctions, over 750,000 children died from starvation and disease. Clinton's Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, said in 1996, that even though 500,000 children had died from the sanctions, "the price is worth it." The sanction's also strengthened Saddam's regime, uniting the people against this outside threat.

But imposing economic sanctions on Iraq was not the extent of Clinton's policy towards Iraq. Under Clinton, Iraq underwent the longest sustained bombing campaign since Vietnam. With opposition from the majority of the United Nations, the U.S. and British militaries bombed suspected targets in so-called "no-fly zones." These were areas where the U.S. decided to forbid Iraqi's military from flying and carrying out any military operations. Thousands of bombs kept dropping on Iraq throughout Clinton's presidency, killing numerous civilians. In 1993, Clinton ordered U.S. warplanes to destroy Iraqi intelligence centers.

Another part of the sanctions policy required Iraq to be opened up to the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) weapons inspectors, to seek out and dismantle any facilities that could produce weapons of mass destruction. UNSCOM was supposed to be used simply to dismantle Iraq's weapons production facilities. But, instead, under Clinton, the CIA secretly used UNSCOM as a means to get access into Iraq and spy on Saddam's regime. They set up secret operations inside UNSCOM facilities, wire-tapped their communications, and had CIA agents pose as UNSCOM inspectors. The information the CIA gathered throughout this process was used to identify the "no-fly zones", the targets for continuous bombardment by the U.S. and British military.

In 1998, Clinton's covert policy of "regime change" in Iraq, became overt. On October 31st, Clinton signed the "Iraq Liberation Act" which made it an official policy of the U.S. to bring about "regime change" in Iraq. Clinton ordered a massive four-day bombardment all over Iraq in December of 1998, once again aimed at weakening Saddam's regime and possibly assassinating Saddam Hussein. Clinton claimed the reason for the bombing was because Saddam Hussein had kicked out the UNSCOM weapons inspectors and had refused to comply with the inspection teams when they were in the country, implying that his weapons production facilities still existed. But according to chief weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, inspection teams were able to identify and dismantle the majority of Iraq's weapon facilities, eliminating any military threat from Iraq. They were kicked out only because of the CIA's use of UNSCOM for spying. Ritter resigned in 1998, before the bombing, when he found out about the CIA's infiltration and manipulation of UNSCOM.

Clinton's policy towards Iraq laid the foundation for the invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq in 2003. And once the 2003 invasion of Iraq was underway, Clinton was quick to appear on *60 Minutes* and assure viewers he supported President Bush's decision to go to war.

### **Kosovo: The So-Called Humanitarian War**

With the obstacle of the Soviet Union removed in 1991, the U.S. quickly set its sights on setting up military bases and establishing new economic relationships in the former Soviet Bloc. Ongoing ethnic tensions in the area of former Yugoslavia were seen as an opening for U.S. intervention.

A major dispute flared up in Serbia, a part of former Yugoslavia. In the province of Kosovo, there was overwhelming support for independence from Serbia, based on ethnic tensions between the majority Albanian Kosovars and the Serbs. Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic, ordered an attack on Kosovo and killed about 2000 people in 1999. Milosevic had already demonstrated his ruthlessness toward opposition movements in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995, killing thousands.

Using NATO, the U.S. proposed to take over full control of Kosovo, and occupy all of Yugoslavia. This proposal was rejected by the Serbian government as an obvious attempt by the U.S. to occupy the country, and they issued a counterproposal, denying NATO occupation, but calling for negotiations. The counterproposal was rejected by the U.S. influence in NATO, and NATO forces, led by the U.S., were ordered to begin bombing the



country.

The bombing was portrayed in the U.S. media as a means to stop the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, the forced removal of the Albanians from the area. But by two months after the bombing, over 800,000 Albanians were forced to leave Kosovo anyway. In reality, the bombing campaign hastened and exaggerated the attacks on the Albanians and their removal from Kosovo. Thousands of civilians were killed by the NATO bombing.

The motives for the attack on Yugoslavia were revealed immediately after the bombing. The U.S. began to station thousands of troops all over former Yugoslavia. The U.S. military seized 1,000 acres of farmland in southeast Kosovo, and immediately began building Camp Bondsteel, the largest U.S. military base at that time. It stations nearly 7,000 troops – three quarters of all the U.S. troops in Kosovo. It has over 15 miles of roads and over 300 buildings. It is so big that it has three different downtowns, retail outlets, a bowling alley, a 24-hour gym, a church, a library and one of the best-equipped hospitals in Europe. Soon after the base was operational, the U.S.-owned, Albanian-Macedonia-Bulgarian Oil Corporation (AMBO) went ahead to finalize plans to build the major "trans-Balkan" pipeline from the Black Sea to the Adriatic Sea, passing through former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo.

What was sold to U.S. citizens as a bombing campaign of morality was nothing more than a move by the U.S. to establish a military and economic presence in the former Soviet Bloc.

### **Other Catastrophes**

**Somalia** In 1993, the Clinton administration used the U.S. military to lead a disastrous intervention in a civil conflict in Somalia for the benefit of U.S. oil corporations. By the end of 1990 nearly two thirds of the Somalia's countryside had been allocated to U.S. corporations (Chevron, Amoco, Conoco, and Phillips) for oil exploration under Somalia's pro-U.S. President Mohamed Siad Barre. In January of 1991, after years of drought and desperate poverty throughout Somalia, Barre was overthrown by one of several clan-based Somali rebel groups. At that point, the country descended into a chaotic battle between various factions of these rebels. So long as Somalia was being torn apart by internal warfare, all plans for U.S. oil exploration had to be halted. So, in 1993, the Clinton administration ordered the U.S. military to intervene in the conflict. The official reason for the U.S. mission in Somalia was to provide humanitarian assistance to the country's impoverished population. But quickly the real purpose for the U.S. military's presence in Somalia was clear: to overthrow some of the rebel groups, end the conflict, and reopen U.S. oil exploration.

The U.S. attacked a meeting of tribal elders on one side of the conflict, bombing the house and then shooting almost everyone inside. This only incensed the population against the U.S. Later the U.S. ordered an attack on one of the leading rebel groups in Somalia's capitol and most populated city, Mogadishu. The attack was a disaster and led to the deaths of 19 U.S. soldiers and over 2,000 Somalis.

**Haiti** In 1991, Jean Bertrand Aristide was Haiti's first democratically elected President,

following decades of U.S. backed military dictatorships in the country. Aristide was a well-known minister with roots in the poor Haitian population. The U.S. was not sure they could trust him since he was elected on promises to divert some of Haiti's wealth to pay for services to the poor. Immediately after his election as President, he was overthrown in a coup backed by the CIA. The coup installed an extremely brutal dictatorship for four years. During that time (1991-1994), the situation in Haiti went from bad to worse. The coup government began to pillage the economy and expand the production and trade of drugs. It was obvious their policies were destabilizing the country, pushing the population towards further social unrest.

When Clinton was in office, in 1994 he met with Aristide and negotiated a deal to re-install him as the President. Aristide had to agree to cooperate with the U.S. to control the Haitian economy, which meant diverting the wealth into the bank accounts of U.S corporations and away from the masses living in destitute poverty, in the poorest nation in the western hemisphere.

**Palestine/Israel** Clinton initiated a negotiation between Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority Chairman, Yasir Arafat. The myth is that Israel, once again, offered the Palestinians a generous peace agreement that would include over 90 percent of their original land. And for encouraging such a generous offer, Clinton was portrayed as a powerful leader, accomplishing what many thought was impossible. The reality, however, was the offer made to the Palestinians was nothing more than a Palestinian state in name. The offer would have carved up Palestine into four disconnected pieces, still separated by Israeli roadblocks and checkpoints. The major Israeli settlements, housing over 300,000 Israeli settlers on Palestinian land, were to remain in place. And the 300 miles of roads connecting the settlements would stay put as well. The Palestinians who were kicked out of their homes for the construction of these settlements still had no right to return. The so-called generous offer was, once again, nothing more than a way to get Palestine to formally accept being reduced to a permanent colony of Israel.

**Rwanda** Following decades of colonial occupation by Belgium, the population of Rwanda was forced to live in extreme poverty. Typical of colonial and imperialist occupation, various ethnic rivalries in Rwanda were pitted against each other as a means to keep the population divided. In the early 1990s, this conflict broke out into open civil war. In 1994, the civil war intensified and reached genocidal levels. Over the course of 100 days somewhere between 500,000 to over one million Rwandans were murdered by extremist militia groups. This massacre was far worse than the so-called "ethnic cleansing" going on in Yugoslavia or the warlord war in Somalia. The Clinton administration did nothing to defend against the genocidal slaughter, firmly showing their claims of humanitarian motives in foreign policy were based on U.S. economic interests and not concerns over human life.

### **Global Warming – Not a Severe Threat**

It is no secret that the United States is the world's largest emitter of carbon into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels. When carbon is released into the atmosphere it bonds with oxygen to form carbon dioxide, which is the most significant gas responsible for global warming.

Part of the false Clinton legacy is his administration's supposedly pro-environment agenda. This myth has gained support ever since Clinton's Vice President Al Gore, released a film called *An Inconvenient Truth*. In this film, Gore exposes some of the economic causes of Global Warming, and in the process paints himself as a committed environmentalist.

The actual record, however, of the Clinton administration on the environment is horrendous. First, one minor motivation behind the various trade agreements the Clinton administration supported was to allow U.S. corporations to avoid environmental restrictions. When U.S. corporations gained improved access to developing countries around the world, an additional benefit was the avoidance of environmental laws governing production. Once they established production in developing countries, most often U.S. corporations could operate with complete disregard for the environmental impact on those countries. Just some of the consequences of this freedom include polluted rivers, destroyed forests and grasslands, flooded cities, and the wiping out of endangered species.

The Clinton administration is also remembered as being a supporter of the Kyoto Protocol, which was an international agreement placing limited restrictions on pollution in countries around the world. Under the Clinton administration, the U.S. did sign the agreement. But the Clinton administration never even submitted the protocol to the Senate to be ratified, so the signature was meaningless.

So, ultimately, Clinton's policy towards the environment was one of environmental destruction not preservation.

In his two-terms as President, on all fronts – social services, foreign-policy, the environment and even civil liberties – Clinton ruthlessly defended the interests of the ruling elite of the U.S.

### **A Brief History of the Democratic Party Since Bill Clinton**

For much of the eight years of George W. Bush's administration, the Democrats have tried to distance themselves from the Bush administration, occasionally criticizing some its policies. But despite their criticisms, the Democrats have on the whole supported and helped approve many of the policies they pretend to oppose.

### **September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001: The PATRIOT Act**

Shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the USA PATRIOT Act was introduced as a bill into Congress and passed by a nearly unanimous vote (only one Senator voted against it). Once it was signed into law, the Patriot Act laid the foundation for extending the powers of law enforcement and greatly restricting civil liberties. The Patriot Act was an extension of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act which was passed under Bill Clinton in 1996. The Patriot Act virtually eliminated habeas corpus for anyone the U.S. government deems a terrorist suspect. Habeas corpus is a person's right to a trial with the evidence presented before a judge to defend their innocence. But under the Patriot Act, the government can hold people as terrorist suspects indefinitely without any trial, and often

without any access to a lawyer, or even their families. It also allows for terrorist suspects to be deported, often to a country the U.S. chooses. The Patriot Act also makes it easier for law enforcement to place wiretaps, search houses, read emails, personal mail, banking records, and so on. Under the Patriot Act, law enforcement is granted permission to arrest, detain, interrogate, spy on, and search practically any person law enforcement deems a terrorist suspect, or any person who they think could be useful to a terrorist investigation.

The term “terrorist” is intentionally defined very loosely to include broad groups of people, allowing the U.S. government to pin the charge of terrorist suspect on nearly anyone they wish. The definition includes such vague statements as any person who “intends to intimidate or coerce a civilian population”; or “influence the policy of the government by intimidation or coercion”; or “the use of a dangerous device with the intent to endanger, directly or indirectly, the safety of one or more individuals or to cause substantial damage to property.” These descriptions might just as easily apply to a well-organized strike of workers outside their workplace, or to a mass demonstration of people against a war.

Already in 2003, human rights groups estimated that approximately 15,000 people were arrested and detained by the U.S. government under the Patriot Act. And at least 3,208 of them were deported. Since then the numbers have approximately doubled. In a majority of these cases, evidence against the individuals was not presented. People were often detained for months while their families had no idea what happened to them. And those who were deported sometimes saw their families only hours before they were sent away on a plane.

The Patriot Act was initially passed in October 2001 and was supposed to expire in 2006. But Congress introduced a bill in March 2006 making the Patriot Act permanent. This passed with virtual unanimous support from both Democrats and Republicans. And in 2007, the Democratic-controlled Congress passed HR 1955 (Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act) by a landslide. This bill extends the ability of the U.S. government to label groups of U.S. citizens as terrorists and imprison them.

### **The Invasion of Afghanistan: “Operation Enduring Freedom”**

Less than a month after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the U.S. military began its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Both Democrats and Republicans unanimously supported the invasion from the beginning. The day the bombing began, Congress issued a bipartisan statement declaring that they “strongly support the operation President Bush ordered our military forces to carry out today.”

The pretext for the invasion was that the supposed mastermind behind the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Osama Bin Laden, and his terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, were in Afghanistan. The brutal Taliban regime, which ruled Afghanistan at that time, was accused by the U.S. of protecting Al Qaeda. The U.S. military issued the Taliban an ultimatum that they either surrender Osama Bin Laden or face a U.S. attack. The Taliban responded to the ultimatum by requesting negotiations and actual evidence that Osama Bin Laden was responsible for the attacks. The U.S. began the attacks anyway.

The impact of the bombing and the occupation that has followed has been horrendous.

Within one year of the invasion, the estimated death toll of Afghan civilians was over 3,700 people. The U.S. repeatedly bombed villages, killing entire families. At least twice the U.S. bombed Red Cross food distribution centers.

Soon after the invasion, the Taliban lost power and retreated to Pakistan. The country was ruled by the U.S. military and a puppet government headed by Hamid Karzai, a former Unocal oil company consultant. Karzai was assisting the U.S. in its negotiation with the Taliban in 1999 to construct an oil pipeline to the Caspian Sea.

The alleged reasons for this war were to capture Osama Bin Laden, remove the Taliban regime, and build a better life for the people of Afghanistan. None of this has been accomplished, and life for most Afghans has only gotten worse. Over 50,000 NATO troops (most from the U.S.) occupy the country. More civilians have been killed by U.S./NATO troops than were ever killed by the Taliban. So far the civilian death toll is close to 20,000. The U.S.-backed puppet government of Hamid Karzai has virtually broken down. Rival groups of brutal warlords, including the reorganized Taliban, control about 75 percent of the country. Women in Afghanistan live in constant fear of kidnapping and rape. Out of 177 countries surveyed (in the Human Poverty Index), Afghanistan came in second to last for standard of living. Over 6.5 million people risk starvation. At least 40 percent of the population is jobless and without an income. Life in Afghanistan is a disaster.

As of July 2008, Democrats and Republicans continue to give full support for war funding and troop increases for the occupation of Afghanistan because they claim it is a crucial battle in the so-called “war on terror.” But the real interests of the U.S. in Afghanistan have nothing to do with the war on terror. The occupation of Afghanistan, along with U.S. military bases in countries to the north, position the U.S. in a key region in Central Asia, which was formerly controlled by the Soviet Union and is expected to become the world’s third largest producer of oil and natural gas by 2010.

### **The Invasion of Iraq**

The Bush administration tried to build support for a war against Iraq based on the three main ideas:

- 1) That Saddam Hussein was linked to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>.
- 2) That Saddam Hussein must be removed from power because his regime possessed weapons of mass destruction, which posed a severe threat to the U.S.
- 3) To establish a democratic society in Iraq.

The connection between Saddam Hussein and the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> proved to be ridiculous, now exposed as a fabricated lie. For decades, Saddam Hussein and his ruling secular Ba’ath party brutally repressed Islamic militants inside Iraq. Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden’s only relationship was an antagonistic one.

The claims of weapons of mass destruction have subsequently been proven not only false but to be based on evidence fabricated by the Bush administration. No such weapons were ever found in Iraq. UN chief weapons inspectors testified that all of the weapons were destroyed during the 1990s. Many of the documents the Bush administration used to build its case for war have since been proven to be forgeries. Several Pentagon employees and

Bush administration insiders have since spoken out about how the case for war was built upon fabricated evidence and outright lies.

And the claim about building democracy in Iraq, though it was a lie from the beginning, has been proved completely false since the day the occupation began.

Despite massive opposition around the world and in the U.S. to the war before it began, coupled with powerful arguments against the Bush administration's case for going to war, Congress still voted to authorize President Bush to wage war on Iraq. Eighty six Democrats voted in favor of the resolution and 126 voted against it. Many of those who voted against the resolution were not against a military attack, but wanted to go through more diplomacy first. The Democrats strong support for the war was shown most clearly through their continual approval of funding for the war and for troop increases in Iraq ever since.

Today, over five years since the invasion began, daily life in Iraq remains unlivable for most people. Unemployment is as high as 70 percent. The average wage for those with jobs is \$150 per month. Consumer goods have doubled in price since the occupation began. Only 37 percent of Iraqi homes are connected to sewer systems. One quarter of Iraqi children suffer from chronic malnutrition. Seventy percent of all childhood deaths result from simple diarrhea and respiratory illness. Ninety percent of hospitals lack essential resources. Estimates of the death toll of Iraqis range as high as over one million. According to the U.N., 100,000 people are fleeing the country each month, with the number of Iraqis now living in other Arab countries estimated at over two million. An estimated 2.5 million are refugees displaced within Iraq. Death squads and militias carry out regular suicide-bombings, creating an estimated daily death toll of 100 Iraqis.

Despite discussions of troop withdrawal, the U.S. shows no intention to ever leave Iraq. Currently, the U.S. has over 15 massive military bases. It is finishing construction of an over 740 million dollar embassy. The embassy includes 21 buildings, its own water source and purification plant, a power plant, and its own bus system. In addition to these bases, the U.S. has been unsuccessfully trying to get the Iraqi parliament to pass a law to hand over Iraq's oil to U.S. corporations for future decades.

### **2006 Midterm Congressional Elections**

Voters did not elect a Democrat for President in the 2004 presidential election. John Kerry was the Democratic Party candidate. But the differences between him and Bush were difficult for people to identify. Kerry voted in favor of the PATRIOT Act and the invasion of Iraq. He was a firm supporter of the war in Afghanistan. Throughout Kerry's campaign he made a point to appear to have an equally if not more aggressive foreign policy than George Bush's.

However, for the election for Congress in 2006, the Democratic Party candidates tried a different strategy. Many candidates campaigned as being harshly anti-Bush and anti-war. Overwhelmingly the public voted in favor of electing Democrats to Congress. The Democrats took 29 seats in the House of Representatives, six seats in the Senate, and took away six governorships from the Republicans. The election gave the Democrats a majority in both houses of Congress, with 51 Democrats to 49 Republicans in the Senate, and 233 Democrats to 202 Republicans in the House. Many people voted for a Democrat because

they viewed their vote as a way to stop the war and possibly impeach the Bush administration. Some important Democrats were arguing strongly for impeachment before the elections. Once the Democrats were seated as the majority in Congress, however, their aggressive anti-war rally calls disappeared. Very quickly, Nancy Pelosi, the newly-elected Speaker of the House, announced that impeachment was off the table. And every chance the Democrats got to vote, they actually voted to continue the war. Every war appropriations bill proposed by the Bush administration was passed by the Democratic controlled Congress. That means the majority of the Democrats voted in favor of it. Every new Bush administration appointment was approved by Congress. Just four months after the Democrats were elected to Congress, they voted for an additional \$150 billion for war costs in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **The Democratic Primaries and the 2008 Presidential Election**

The Democratic primary started off with several candidates who had few differences between them. Taking their strategies from the Congressional elections two years earlier, the candidates all campaigned on anti-war and anti-Bush messages. After the first round of primaries the race narrowed down to two candidates, Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton.

Many people became swept up with their campaigns because both candidates offered something new on the surface: the potential of Barack Obama as the first African American President, and Hilary Clinton as the first woman President. But these candidates differed little from each other, and from the Bush administration.

When it comes to the so-called war on terror, both Obama and Clinton have been firm supporters of the Patriot Act, the occupation of Afghanistan, and the occupation of Iraq. They both voted to renew the Patriot Act. Obama and Clinton campaigned behind the idea of increasing the troops and the spending on the occupation of Afghanistan. Though Clinton voted in favor of the resolution that approved the invasion of Iraq, she campaigned on the claim that had she known then what she knows now, she would have never voted in favor of the resolution. Obama was not a Senator at the time of the vote and he campaigned on the claim that he was opposed to the war on Iraq from the beginning. Their voting records in Congress, however, don't support their campaigns speeches. They both continually voted in favor of bills before Congress that increased the funding for the occupation and sent more troops to Iraq.

Both candidates promised strong support for the policies of the government of Israel, which has carried out a brutal occupation of Palestine for over 50 years.

Both candidates supported the charges of the Bush administration that Iran poses a serious threat to the U.S. They claimed that the threat was great enough to possibly require U.S. military strikes against Iran.

Obama and Clinton's proposals around health care, have given many people some hope. Both of them campaigned on the promise to bring health care to every citizen in this country. But their health care plans, if enacted, would try to make health care similar to auto insurance. Purchasing health insurance would be required by law, and citizens could even receive fines for not purchasing it. Their plans don't actually address the underlying

problem behind health care, which is its enormous costs, making it unaffordable for millions of people. Requiring health care doesn't mean that people will magically be able to pay for it. Their proposals offer vague recommendations for allocating some funds to assist those who have low-incomes but these details are not at all clear. Though they may provide small numbers of people with minor assistance in affording health care, their proposals do little more than funnel people's money into the hands of super-rich insurance companies.

The campaigns of Obama and Clinton looked a lot like the campaigns of previous Democrats. Obama and Clinton tried very hard to appear to represent a real hope for change, but in reality they plan to carry out the same or very similar policies to those carried out by Democrats in the past. Their true colors show when we can see the confidence that the corporate elite have in them. Major contributors to their campaigns are weapons manufacturers, huge banks and financial institutions, media corporations, and other large corporations. The list includes Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, JP Morgan Chase, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Time Warner. To run a traditional campaign requires the backing of the big corporations and banks. Federal Election Commission Chairman Michael Toner estimated that to be taken seriously, a candidate needed to raise at least \$100 million by the end of 2007 and projected that the 2008 campaigns will spend at least one billion dollars.

### **A Closer Look at Barack Obama's Campaign for President**

It is no surprise that many workers are excited to vote for Barack Obama. For many, it is their way of expressing their outrage against the government's policies for the last several years. Some see it as a way to vote against the Bush administration and the Republican Party, which Senator McCain represents. When racism remains a powerful division in the U.S., it is understandable why a large percentage of African Americans want to vote for Obama. An African American president is seen by many as the symbol of an end to the racist barriers that have limited opportunities of African Americans for so long. Many have also become attracted to Obama's message of change. Obama often speaks about bringing change to Washington and about standing up to corporate fat cats. For most working people, struggling just to make ends meet, change is what we need. But as much as Obama may change the face of the President in Washington, he will not change the interests which Washington defends.

Obama's record in politics shows his priorities far better than any of his campaign speeches. As mentioned, Obama has voted to support the Patriot Act at every opportunity. He has voted to approve hundreds of billions of dollars for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He plans to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan.

As Senator, Obama has voted for legislation which makes it more difficult for working people to file lawsuits against corporations. In 2005, he voted to pass the Class Action Fairness Act which took away the right to file class action lawsuits in state courts. Now, they can only be filed in federal courts, which hears far fewer of them, and rules in favor of corporations far more often. Obama voted against legislation that would have put a limit to the interest rates credit card companies can charge customers. He also voted in favor of legislation which allowed health care companies to issue apologies instead of payments in



cases of malpractice. He supported legislation that allowed mining companies to buy up public land for extremely reduced rates and avoid paying back the cities and states they mine in. As Senator of Illinois, Obama passed legislation restricting pollution by large corporations, winning the support of environmentalists. Obama claims to support alternatives to oil, suggesting ethanol as a clean energy source, as it comes primarily from corn. A leader of the ethanol industry is Archer Daniels Midland, an Illinois based agriculture company, and a major contributor to Obama's campaigns. The process of converting corn into ethanol, combined with the increased amounts of ethanol needed to fuel engines, makes ethanol a greater polluter than gasoline. The agriculture industry has contributed more than one million dollars to Obama's campaign.

The largest contributors to Obama's campaign come from multinational banks, powerful corporate law firms, polluting energy companies, and huge media conglomerates. At the top of this list is Goldman Sachs, which has provided over \$500,000 to Obama's campaigns. Goldman Sachs is one of the largest investment banks in the world. Its board of directors head up corporations such as: General Motors, Pfizer (the world's largest pharmaceutical company), KB Home (one of the largest construction companies in the U.S.), United Health Group (one of the largest health insurance companies in the U.S.), Temple Inland (a gigantic lumber company and world leader in deforestation), BankOne Corp (a massive banking firm and leader in the credit industry). These firms are connected to corporations like McDonalds, General Electric, and other leading corporations in just about every major industry.

Obama has selected Joe Biden as his Vice Presidential running mate. Biden has been a longtime Washington insider, with over 35 years experience as a defender of the ruling elite of this country.

Biden, unlike Obama, was in the Senate when the vote to authorize the war on Iraq took place. He voted in favor of it. He argued at the time that a war on Iraq would be a "march to peace and security." Biden has also voted to approve every bill to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Biden even outdid the Bush administration when he introduced legislation to increase the war appropriations by \$13 billion, most of this money going to weapons manufacturers. Biden supports the plan of sending more soldiers to Afghanistan. Biden is also a strong supporter of Israel's brutal occupation of Palestine. He has accepted tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from various Israeli lobbying groups. Biden also voted to pass and renew the Patriot Act.

In 2005, Biden helped pass legislation that severely reduced the ability for workers to file for bankruptcy protection. It was a clear attack on workers and a gift to credit card companies. It makes it easier for landlords to evict a bankrupt tenant. It even allows creditors to take child-support payments away from parents to repay debts. It protects the rich by allowing them to safeguard an unlimited amount of funds as equity in their homes. It even allows creditors to give misleading information about credit card contracts. The credit card companies had been trying to pass this legislation for years. When it was finally passed in 2005, these companies had spent \$34 million on lobbying and campaign contributions in the previous nine years. The credit company MBNA is from Biden's congressional state of Delaware. They contributed tens of thousands of dollars to his senatorial campaign. They were even involved in a scandal in which an executive from MBNA paid top dollar to buy Biden's house. To everyone, it looked like nothing more than

a strategy to funnel more money into Biden's pockets.

Biden also played a major role in attacking the poor and working class in the 90s. Biden helped pass legislation introduced by the Clinton administration to kick millions of people off of welfare. Obama supported the legislation as well. The legislation reduced food stamps, medical assistance and all around assistance to those most who needed it most.

Today, with wages down, prices up, corporations getting richer, and life for most working people seeming to only be getting more difficult, workers are right to want a change. But make no mistake about it – we need to see more than symbolic change. The change we want to see is not going to come from an Obama/Biden presidency, or the Democrat Party they represent.

## **Conclusion**

At a time when the majority of the population is fed up with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; with an economic crisis threatening their lives and livelihood; with escalating gas and food prices; with rising unemployment, mortgage foreclosures, lack of health care and increasing crime, there is a great need and potential for new social struggles in the U.S. today.

When the approval ratings for both the Bush administration and the Democratic majority Congress are in the low twentieth percentiles, there is obviously great disillusionment and unhappiness with the current political situation and the two major parties who control the government. There is certainly every reason for people to be looking for a change coming from outside of the “politics as usual” of presidential elections and the selling of new presidential candidates.

This is not a time to repeat the mistakes of the past and put new hopes in the Democrats and elections. If people take the 15 minutes it takes to vote because they feel they have to simply register their disapproval of the policies of the last eight years of Bush, that is understandable. But there should be no illusions that anything of significance will come from the vote.

Much more important than this election is what people are prepared to do. Our future does not rest with electoral choices. As this pamphlet has attempted to show by examining the betrayals of the Democrats throughout the past, the Democrats are masters of trickery and deceit. Our hope for change cannot be placed in the passive act of voting for one of two major capitalist parties and their pre-approved and pre-selected candidates, packaged by the media for our consumption as if we were shopping at the mall.

The future will be determined by what the masses of people in the U.S. decide to do today and in the future. It will be decided in the workplaces, neighborhood and the streets of this country. It will depend on how strongly people mobilize themselves and depend on their own forces and their own struggles. It is a question of choosing our own leaders, based on seeing what they do, so that we know whom we can trust and who is not trustworthy.

The U.S. ruling class has the two main parties of this country at its complete disposal and

service. To have a real alternative means to have organizations that really serve and represent the working class and the oppressed layers of the population, the vast majority.

To build a working class party is the objective of the RWG. We know, of course, we are not going to do it by ourselves. But we know also that it is in the interest of the majority of the population and there are many activists and groups who share this objective, and even more people who could support it. It's why we invite all those interested in that goal to join us in order to help organize workers and youth, students and young workers, all who are ready to fight against capitalist society and turn their backs on all the capitalist parties and politicians, whether they present themselves as liberal or conservative, Republicans or Democrats

The Democratic Party is just recycling the same old strategy. We need a real alternative, an alternative based on our own interests, our own forces, our own energy and our own efforts.

Those who don't learn from history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past. Those who study history at least have a chance to learn from the struggles and to see the traps that have been laid. This hopefully can help us to take a different path in the future.