

Democratic Party leaders rally behind pro-war Senator Lieberman

By Patrick Martin
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Three-term US Senator Joseph Lieberman, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in 2000 and a candidate for the party's presidential nomination in 2004, is trailing in his bid for renomination in the August 8 Democratic primary in Connecticut. A poll published July 20 showed a four-point lead for Lieberman's challenger, multi-millionaire businessman Ned Lamont, whose campaign is fueled mainly by anger over the war in Iraq.

Lieberman is notorious not only as an adamant supporter of the war in Iraq, but as an ally of the Bush administration in its incessant efforts to smear opponents of the war as unpatriotic or endorsing appeasement of terrorists. He became a potent symbol of the collaboration of the congressional Democrats with the Republican administration, particularly after Bush planted a kiss on Lieberman's cheek as he entered the Capitol in January 2005 to deliver his State of the Union speech.

The dramatic fall in the polls for Lieberman in the course of the summer demonstrates the depth of the opposition to the war in Iraq and the mounting unpopularity of the Bush administration. The most recent poll found that Republican voters favored the reelection of the Democrat Lieberman by far greater margins than Democratic voters.

In the last few weeks, after largely ignoring his opponent for months, Lieberman has begun serious campaigning throughout the state, aided by a corps of Democratic Party officeholders, union bureaucrats, and officials of other organizations traditionally linked to the Democratic Party. But press reports from his campaign events document the isolation and unpopularity of Lieberman's reelection bid.

A *Los Angeles Times* report August 1 painted the following picture: "On Friday, Lieberman launched a 10-day bus tour of the state. But during its first stops, he drew only small crowds. And at almost every stop, he was dogged by Ed Anderson, a New Haven business owner

who followed him in a pickup truck containing giant papier-mache busts of the senator and Bush embracing. By contrast, about 100 people, many of them standing, crowded into the American Clock & Watch Museum in Bristol Saturday night to hear Lamont; that was more supporters than appeared to turn out at all of Friday's Lieberman events combined."

Former president Bill Clinton campaigned with Lieberman last week, and a parade of Democratic senators has passed through the state to support him, including such purportedly "antiwar" liberals as Barbara Boxer of California, along with Joseph Biden of Delaware, Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and Ken Salazar of Colorado.

The Democratic senator's campaign is in direct conflict with revulsion for the war in Iraq among Democratic voters in Connecticut (and nationally—according to one recent poll, only 24 percent of Democratic voters still regard the decision to go to war in Iraq as justified).

Lieberman initially attempted to deal with this issue by suggesting that his support for the war, in the face of popular hostility, was a sign of courage. When this argument gained little traction, he switched courses and sought, somewhat ludicrously, to shift the campaign debate to domestic issues.

"We're going to try hard to focus this back on the issues that I think really are ultimately more important to the future of families in Connecticut: jobs, health care, education," he told the *New York Times*, as though any of these vital issues could be separated from the Bush administration's program of war, domestic repression and attacks on the social position of the working class.

Lieberman received a series of blows this week, beginning with Sunday's editorial in the *New York Times*, casting him as an apologist for the Bush White House and endorsing Lamont. This was followed by a series of campaign events for Lamont in black working class

neighborhoods, where Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson gave Lieberman's opponent their support.

In one noteworthy incident, Michael Schiavo, husband of the brain-damaged Terri Schiavo, made a campaign stop with Lamont in Hartford. He denounced Lieberman for siding with the Christian fundamentalists and supporting legislation which sought to block his decision to take his wife off life support last year after she had lived more than a decade in a persistent vegetative state.

Schiavo denounced Bush, former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay and other congressional Republicans who were the prime sponsors of the bill, but included Lieberman as a key Democratic ally.

"Joe Lieberman never met me," Schiavo told the rally. "He never met Terri. Joe Lieberman didn't know anything about us or what Terri wanted." Told that Lieberman had said it was now time "for politicians to let Terri Schiavo rest in peace," Michael Schiavo responded that legislators like Lieberman had made the case political. "He should've just stayed out of it," Schiavo said.

Except for his decision to challenge an incumbent senator, Lamont is an utterly conventional figure in American bourgeois politics. His position on the Iraq war differs little from that of Senator John Kerry or House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, calling for a withdrawal of American forces to bases in Iraq and Kuwait and turning over the active combat role to the military and police of the US-backed stooge regime.

Lamont fully supports the US-Israeli war against Lebanon, and has made statements defending the Israeli bombing that were indistinguishable from those of Lieberman.

The great-grandson of one of the original partners in J. P. Morgan, Lamont was a multi-millionaire from birth, then built an additional fortune of an estimated \$200 million from a business providing specialized cable-television services to colleges and universities. He is the great nephew of Corliss Lamont, the millionaire who ran as a third-party "peace" candidate for governor of New York in 1958. He was briefly a councilman in Greenwich, the upper-class suburb of New York, and once ran unsuccessfully for state senator.

While the support for his campaign expresses massive popular opposition to the Iraq war and the Bush administration, as well as disgust with the Democratic Party establishment, Lamont's candidacy is a dead end for those seeking to bring an end to the war. Were Lamont to be elected, he would quickly be brought into

line on Iraq, as his fervent defense of Israeli aggression demonstrates.

The endorsement of Lamont by the *New York Times* reflects the concern, on the part of the sections of the American ruling elite for whom it speaks, that the two-party system is becoming increasingly discredited by the unanimity of the Democrats and Republicans behind a common program of war abroad and repression and social reaction at home.

The *Times* editorial calls Lieberman a Bush "enabler" and "one of the Bush administration's most useful allies as the president tries to turn the war on terror into an excuse for radical changes in how this country operates." It concludes: "this primary is not about Mr. Lieberman's legislative record. Instead it has become a referendum on his warped version of bipartisanship, in which the never-ending war on terror becomes an excuse for silence and inaction."

What is the perspective revealed here? The editors are concerned above all that opposition to the Iraq war must be co-opted and confined within the framework of the two-party system. If the tens of millions so deeply opposed to the war in Iraq feel that there is no room for their views within the Democratic Party—and there is not!—they will look elsewhere. That is what the *Times'* editors fear most.

Lieberman has already taken out nominating papers to run as an independent candidate in the November elections in the event that he loses the Democratic primary. The outcome of both contests cannot be predicted with any certainty. Whatever the immediate result, however, the Lamont campaign represents a trap, not a genuine alternative, for the growing movement against the war in Iraq.

The opposition to the war can be brought forward only on the basis of an independent, socialist perspective and opposition to both parties of US imperialism, the Democrats as much as the Republicans.

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