

Iraq war opponent Cindy Sheehan arrested at Democratic Congressman's office

By Kate Randall
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Antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan and dozens of supporters were arrested in the Rayburn House office building in Washington DC on Monday following an hour-long meeting with Democratic Representative John Conyers of Michigan.

Sheehan and others came to the offices to meet with Conyers, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, to demand he initiate impeachment proceedings against President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney. When Conyers indicated he would not begin such proceedings and the protesters refused to leave, an estimated 47 were led away in plastic handcuffs by Capital Police.

Sheehan and a group of supporters set off July 13th on a march from Atlanta, Georgia to press their demand for impeachment, arriving in the capital on Monday. Hundreds of protesters lined the hallways outside Conyers office while Sheehan and two others met with the congressman and several staffers. The discussion was reportedly heated and ended with Sheehan and others staging a sit-in in the congressman's office.

According to one of the protesters, David Swanson, Conyers first suggested that impeachment be discussed at a town hall meeting in August. He then said he feared that if he were to move forward on impeachment now, Fox News would go after him and accuse him of being "partisan."

In an article appearing in the *American Chronicle* on Tuesday, "The Conyers Legacy," Swanson writes, "When pressed [at the meeting] to act with the urgency appropriate to saving lives, Conyers replied that our nation has always killed people and that he wasn't 'going to play politics'."

Conyers defended his position by saying that with only a one-seat majority in the Senate, the Democrats

do not have the necessary votes—two-thirds of the Senate—to convict on impeachment.

When questioned by the WSWWS at a press conference July 9 at the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) conference in Detroit, Conyers maintained this same position, responding irritably, "It isn't just a matter of me going in and impeaching. If I don't have 218 votes in the House and I don't have 67 members in the Senate ... I can't go back and impeach him if I don't have anybody behind me, and I can't do it, and the election's next year. Do you see the rationale?"

Conyers' attempts to rationalize his and other Democrats' refusal to push for impeachment are simply so many attempts to cover up their own complicity in the policy of the Bush administration.

In 2005 and 2006, when the Republicans still controlled Congress, Conyers held hearings that raised the issue of impeachment. Conyers himself introduced legislation seeking an impeachment inquiry into the launching and conduct of the war in Iraq. He also called at the time for the creation of a special committee, modeled on the Ervin Committee that investigated the crimes of Nixon, to investigate the Bush administration.

Conyers has offered no serious explanation for why impeachment was on the table in 2005 and 2006, when the Democrats were in the minority, and not in 2007, when they are in the majority and Conyers himself is the chairman of the main committee responsible for initiating impeachment proceedings.

The reason for this shift lies in the fact that Conyers' calls for impeachment investigations then were intended merely as a smokescreen at a time when he did not have the power associated with having the congressional majority. Now that he is in such a

position, the Democratic Party has no intention of carrying these threats out.

During the protest on Monday, Sheehan also formally announced that she would run for the US Congress from California in 2008 against Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker, because Pelosi has refused to pursue impeachment. Sheehan had set a July 23 deadline for Pelosi to go on record supporting it.

Pelosi has consistently declared that impeachment is “off the table.” Pelosi’s press secretary released the following statement in relation to Sheehan’s candidacy: “The speaker is focused on changing course in Iraq by bringing our troops home safely and soon and refocusing our effort on protecting Americans from terrorism.”

In a blog entry, Sheehan said that in running against Pelosi, “I am committed to challenging a two-party system that has kept us in a state of constant warfare for the last 60 years and has become more and more beholden to special interests and has forgotten the faces of the people whom it represents.”

On May 26, Sheehan sent an open letter to Congress announcing that she was leaving the Democratic Party following the Democrats’ vote to authorize an additional \$100 billion to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This vote followed the 2006 mid-term elections in which the Democrats gained the majority in both houses of Congress, based on enormous popular opposition to the war.

Following her resignation, Cindy Sheehan faced the wrath of the pro-Democratic Party liberal-left leadership of the antiwar protest milieu.

She wrote at the time: “I was the darling of the so-called left as long as I limited my protests to George Bush and the Republican Party.... However, when I started to hold the Democratic Party to the same standards that I held the Republican Party, support for my cause started to erode and the ‘left’ started labeling me with the same slurs the right used.”

Sheehan has come under renewed attack on the pro-Democratic *Daily Kos* web site for her decision to run as an independent against Pelosi. In her diary entry dated July 12, she wrote that she had been prevented from continuing her blog on the web site because of her decision to oppose the Democrats.

Cindy Sheehan’s break with the Democratic Party, her call for impeachment and her decision to run

against Pelosi, are a reflection of deep-seated hatred within the US population to the policies of the Bush administration and that of the nominal opposition—the Democratic Party.

The outrage of millions of Americans over the war, however, finds no expression in either party of the official, big business political establishment. Despite the antiwar mandate of the 2006 mid-term elections, Congressional Democrats have continued to fund the war in Iraq because they agree with the foundations on which it was launched—to pursue and defend the geo-political interests of US imperialism. Current approval ratings for Congress are running at below 25 percent, in large measure due to the Democrats’ refusal to oppose Bush.

The reaction of Conyers to Sheehan’s protest—the rapidity with which the police were called to haul her off to prison—underscores the extreme hostility with which the Democratic Party establishment, including its nominally “left” flank, views any genuine expression of popular opposition to the policies of the Bush administration.

The Bush administration has asserted what amounts to dictatorial powers for the president. It has launched an illegal war against Iraq on the basis of outright lies, has violated the law and the constitution while spying on the American people, and has committed innumerable other impeachable offenses, all the while refusing to be accountable in any form for its actions.

However, a serious examination of the crimes of the Bush administration would call attention to the Democratic Party’s own complicity, and would threaten to galvanize social forces that could not be contained within the bankrupt two-party system. For this reason, the Democratic Party is so reluctant to touch the issue.

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