

California's Future Democratic Leaders Engage in Dialogue With State Chairman

by Alexandra Phillips, LaRouche Youth Movement; and Harley Schlanger

History was made on Aug. 30, in South Pasadena, California, when Democratic Party state chairman Art Torres spoke at the monthly meeting of the Franklin Roosevelt Legacy Democratic Club (FRLDC). Torres's appearance was the latest development in a six-year organizing drive by members of the LaRouche Youth Movement (LYM) in California, which has challenged the party to return to the tradition of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The FRLDC is an official club, which was chartered by the Los Angeles County Democratic Central Committee (LACDCC) in April 2006. Its charter was obtained by a vote of the LACDCC, which acknowledged the aggressive organizing activity by members of the LYM who were elected members of the Committee.

Torres engaged in a 30-minute dialogue with the 50 members and guests of the Club, taking up some of the most significant issues facing voters in the United States: the necessity for the immediate impeachment of Vice President, and British agent, Dick Cheney; the need for emergency action to prevent millions of Americans from being evicted from their homes, by adopting Lyndon LaRouche's legislation to put a moratorium on foreclosures; and the importance of a serious campaign of outreach to young voters, to create a new, dynamic leadership in the Democratic Party.

The Battle for FDR's Legacy

Torres began his speech by responding to a quote from Franklin Roosevelt, which was read to open the meeting by FRLDC chairman Quincy O'Neal, in which FDR explained why a "New Deal" for the American people was necessary, to reverse the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"I am an FDR/JFK Democrat," Torres said, "and not a DLC Democrat," referring to the Democratic Leadership Council of Al Gore and Felix Rohatyn, who have worked to obliterate the memory of FDR, on behalf of the same financial networks of Wall Street that FDR fought in the 1930s.

In his presentation, Torres repeatedly extolled the principles of the New Deal, with an emphasis on economic justice. "It's hard for me," he said, "to understand why people don't think social programs are important for those who have the least among us." He spoke of his beginnings in politics, as a young organizer with César Chávez and the United Farm Workers, which took on California's agri-business interests to gain basic rights for immigrant farm workers in the state.

Despite this obviously heartfelt commitment to the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt, Torres also exemplified the weakness of the national Democratic Party in his defense of the performance of the present Congress, especially of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat. He insisted she and the Democratic leadership have been upholding FDR's tradition in their legislative agenda, reviewing what he called the substantive victories of the last eight months.

Punting Like Pelosi

While Torres seems to believe these have not been Pyrrhic victories, it was apparent from the question-and-answer session that the members of the FRLDC are less than impressed by the so-called successes. The key conflict emerged over why the Democrats have ducked the fight to override Cheney's control over the Bush Administration, which is best exemplified by Pelosi's continuing determination to take the impeachment of Cheney "off the table," despite widespread support for impeachment among rank-and-file Democrats. Among the backers of Ohio Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich's HR 333—the Cheney impeachment resolution—are many California Congresswomen, including Maxine Waters, Diane Watson, Barbara Lee, and Lynne Woolsey.

On the matter of impeachment per se, Torres, at first, punted. Asked by a LYM member who had just returned from



EIRNS/Chris Jadatz

California state Democratic Party chair Art Torres (center) addressed the Franklin Roosevelt Legacy Democratic Club Aug. 30, where he engaged in a spirited exchange of views with Cody Jones (left), Quincy O'Neal (right) and others.



EIRNS/Alexandra Phillips

Organizing by the LaRouche Youth Movement in California, over a six-year period, has convinced many in the state Democratic Party that it's time to return to the tradition of Franklin Roosevelt. Here, the LYM mobilizes in Los Angeles to stop the financial crash using FDR-style methods.

months of organizing for impeachment in Washington, about the battle to impeach Cheney, Torres commended him, but then offered the standard excuse: We don't have the votes, since a two-thirds majority is needed in the Senate to remove him from office.

However, he then reversed himself, demonstrating that he still retains some of the idealism and spunk that characterized his early career in politics. "I know we don't have the votes in the Senate to convict; that doesn't prevent us from continuing to organize around those issues. There is one thing I learned from César Chávez. He would always quote to me from [Mahatma] Gandhi . . . that is, 'without a struggle, there is no movement,' so we have to continue this struggle to create this movement, to help people become aware of what's happening with this Administration, and with our country."

But then, he punted again, when asked why the Democrats have not moved in Congress to protect homeowners from foreclosure, by getting behind Lyndon LaRouche's Homeowner and Bank Protection Act of 2007, which is mod-

elled on measures adopted by FDR to protect homeowners and the banks in 1933.

Torres offered the non-solution of Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), to pressure lenders to renegotiate with those falling behind on their payments. When told that this falls far short of what FDR did, he shot back, "The problem is we have a George Bush as President, and not an FDR."

This kind of excuse is not going to inspire young people to join a political fight!

Organize the Youth

Torres's appearance at the meeting demonstrates that he does recognize the importance of the LYM in the Democratic Party in California, as a driving force for recruiting youth, and in providing leadership.

Over the last six years, the LYM has demonstrated repeatedly its unique capability to bring youth into political battles that Baby-Boomer generation Democrats have chosen to sit out. Many of the leaders in the FRLDC cut their teeth in the campaign to defeat the recall of Gov. Gray Davis, and to save California from the fascist "post-partisan" policies of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and his puppet-master George Shultz. While some party leaders, under the direction of Shultz's longtime ally, Wall Street's nominal Democrat, Felix Rohatyn of the DLC, have attempted to keep the LaRouche Youth Movement out of Party activity, those with more vision—and more guts—have opened doors, giving the LYM the opportunity to demonstrate its capabilities to mobilize youth.

LYM members were elected to several county central committees, most importantly, in Los Angeles and Alameda (Oakland) counties, and have had a significant impact in these major centers. In Los Angeles County, LYM members initiated a resolution for Cheney's impeachment, which was passed and brought to the state convention; another resolution for an FDR-style bankruptcy reorganization to protect homeowners, also passed the second time around.

LYM members have also won election to Party positions, with Legacy Club chairman Quincy O'Neal elected vice chairman of the state Democratic Party African-American caucus, and Wynneal Innocentes elected as secretary of the Filipino-American caucus.

The FRLDC has become an important venue, where Party leaders can come to engage in policy discussion, and candidates are now attending meetings to ask for endorsements. Among Party leaders who have recently addressed the Club are Eric Bauman, L.A. County chairman; Reginald Jones-Sawyer, the statewide party secretary; and Darren Parker, chair of the African-American caucus.

Torres concluded his visit by asking FRLDC members to work with him to defeat a Republican dirty trick to change the counting of the Electoral College vote, and by pledging that he will be working with members of the FRLDC to increase youth participation in the Party.