

Democrats' Revolt Against Gore Breaks Into the Open

by Debra Hanania Freeman

As nearly 200 members of the Democratic Party Platform Committee gathered in Cleveland on July 28-29 to finalize the document that will be presented at the party's Los Angeles convention on Aug. 14-17, a dramatic and open revolt against the Gore-dictated platform, and against its explicit rejection of the traditional constituencies that comprise the base of the party, burst into the public arena.

The revolt broke out despite the tyrannical efforts of Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Joe Andrew, a Gore henchman best known for his drive to nullify the Voting Rights Act, and to have the Democratic Party declared a "private club," in order to lock out supporters of Lyndon LaRouche, who continue to threaten the unelectable Gore's "lock" on the Democratic nomination.

At same time as Andrew was telling delegates at a Cleveland City Club luncheon that the party platform would reflect Gore's vision of free trade, fiscal conservatism, and tougher sentencing laws, including the death penalty, a group of well-known Democrats, all of them delegates to the August convention, were sounding a very different note at a well-attended news conference at the Sheraton City Centre hotel, where committee members were staying.

The group, which included Cleveland's Democratic Congressional Representatives Sherrod Brown, Stephanie Tubbs Jones, and Dennis Kucinich, as well as Rep. Carolyn Maloney (N.Y.), United Auto Workers (UAW) Region 2 Director Warren Davis, Cleveland City Council Majority Leader Nelson Cintron, and a delegation of powerful California Democrats, led by State Sen. Tom Hayden, announced that they had formed a "Progressive Democratic Caucus," which Davis said represented "the democratic wing of the Democratic Party."

Arguing that the Gore-dictated platform abandons the values and traditions of the Democratic Party as the voice of working people, minorities, and the poor, spokesmen for the group announced that they would introduce four platform amendments: "Quality Health Care for All," "Fair Trade, Not Slave Trade," "Narrowing the Gap Between Rich and Poor," and a motion to delete support of the National Missile Defense (NMD) program from the platform.

A Disgusting Platform

Lila Garrett, president of Southern California Americans for Democratic Action, insisting that Gore's platform would lead to a disastrous defeat of Democratic candidates at all levels, said, "In the present draft, the platform admits that the gap between the rich and poor is too wide, but passes quickly over it, to rave about the great economy. Despite the increased homeless population, the word 'homeless' never appears. It expresses pride in the decreasing welfare recipients, but never refers to the million children who now live on the streets as a result of welfare 'reform.'"

"It makes a passing reference to unfair labor, health and environmental practices in our global trade policy, but says nothing about correcting it. On the contrary, the platform rhapsodizes about how great the World Trade Organization is, then recommends putting trade on a 'fast track' which would give the President more power, guaranteeing even less Congressional control over violations."

The UAW's Warren Davis pointedly remarked that his union has not as yet endorsed anyone for President, and launched into a blistering attack on the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), co-founded by Gore. Davis called the organization of "New Democrats" a "corporate front inside the Democratic Party, bankrolled by conservative Republicans."

Davis said that it was the DLC policies that had controlled the draft platform, and that "Al Gore has to stop saying that we have nowhere else to go, because we have other choices. If Gore doesn't have the support of the fundamental constituencies, *then Al Gore's candidacy is for naught.*"

One of the new group's organizers admitted privately that there were other issues, particularly the death penalty, that the group would have liked to take up, but that they limited their amendments to ones they were certain could pass. Indeed, the group's leaders seemed confident that their agenda, which was to be introduced by attorney Gloria Allred, a founding member of the Progressive Caucus who sits on the Platform Committee, had sufficient support to be adopted. They had the signatures of 113 Democratic members of Con-

gress on an Open Letter to President Clinton, demanding that the platform be changed to reflect a policy of "Fair Trade, Not Slave Trade." They also had the signatures of 63 House Democrats seeking to delete support for NMD from the platform.

All Dissent Is Quashed

Nevertheless, Gore's thugs moved ruthlessly, as they have throughout the campaign, to silence any dissent. Al From, director of the Democratic Leadership Council, was on the phone, telling journalists as well as members of the Platform Committee, that "the platform will not be dictated by special-interest groups and economic reactionaries." He repeated the formulation that he presented a few weeks earlier at a DLC Convention in Baltimore, that representatives of organized labor, as well as minorities, should be ignored as "retrogrades." In a speech delivered to the members of the Platform Committee, From said, "The Progressive Caucus platform is what lost us the Congress elections. Al Gore has to run on this platform, not some little delegate somewhere. This is a good, unifying platform that will appeal to Republican and independent voters, which is what we want."

Sources also report that a few days before the Cleveland meeting, top labor officials from around the nation were summoned to a meeting with Gore himself. Gore told them he would "take care of them" *after* the election, but that they had to promise not to "rock the boat" now. The officials were told that they had better "lower the boom" on labor representatives who sat on the Platform Committee. Gore demanded a guarantee that the labor delegates would not support any of the Progressive Caucus amendments.

By the time people got to Cleveland, that boom had clearly been lowered. When the Gore campaign hosted an evening reception for members of the Platform Committee on July 28 night, Progressive Caucus members, despite the fact that they were high-ranking elected officials, were kept out. Sources report that strict orders had been issued at the reception to oppose the Progressive Caucus amendments and to "shun" Caucus adherents. On July 29, when the Progressive Caucus hosted a hospitality breakfast reception, they were, indeed, largely shunned.

When the formal proceedings began that day, it did so with all the trappings of an old-style Stalinist Politburo meeting. DNC staff roamed the area, armed with cell phones and walkie-talkies, following anyone they suspected of carrying "unapproved" literature. A big banner was unfurled across the front of the room, touting Gore's mantra of "Prosperity, Progress, and Peace." Pre-selected members of the committee were brought to the microphone to recite paeans to Gore, and to introduce amendments that Gore and the DLC had approved in advance. Delegates who had offered amendments labelled "controversial," withdrew them. When Gloria Allred

introduced the first Progressive Caucus amendment on "Fair Trade," only three members of the committee were willing to second it (a motion required 15 people to second it, before any amendment was even subject to debate). Indeed, all four of the Progressive Caucus amendments were tabled without debate.

Visibly Shocked

Progressive Caucus leaders were visibly shocked. Some were furious. When they moved outside, they were mobbed by press. Representative Kucinich told the press, "We have a record trade deficit, cuts in benefits and wages for working people, and this platform is a move to the right. They talk about a big tent, but this tent just got smaller. I don't think we can win with this platform."

California State Senator Hayden said the platform was sure to infuriate the rank and file. He said that the party's traditional base in his state was already being lost to apathy, or to independent candidate Ralph Nader. "It's going to be impossible to lift the enthusiasm of the foot-soldiers we need to make phone calls and mobilize votes," he said. "Right now, the only thing Al Gore has going for him are negative attacks on the Republican ticket of Bush and Cheney."

Indeed, immediately after Bush named Dick Cheney as his Vice Presidential choice, DNC spin-meisters attacked the former Senator from Wyoming for voting against the Head Start educational program, and for voting against support for South Africa's first post-apartheid leader, Nelson Mandela. But, those attacks aren't likely to garner much support for Gore, especially when Democratic voters figure out that Then-senator Gore had voted with Cheney on both points.

The Gore platform will go to a full vote by the delegates on the second night of the Los Angeles Convention. No amendments will be allowed from the floor, and Convention rules make it virtually impossible to force a floor vote on a minority platform report.

Following the Cleveland debacle, Lyndon LaRouche issued a sharp response to Gore's latest thuggery, and ordered his campaign staff "to stay the course," and to outflank the apparatchiks through massive circulation of the proceedings of the Ad Hoc Platform Committee hearings which his campaign facilitated on June 22 in Washington, D.C. By the time Democratic delegates begin to land in Los Angeles, approximately 750,000 copies of those proceedings will have been distributed, including to each of them.

Convention delegates, including many who are formally pledged to support Gore, have been supporting LaRouche's efforts. One convention delegate told a member of LaRouche's staff, "It's becoming more and more clear. If we want to survive, we have to fight with LaRouche. Our leadership is telling us not to fight. My [union] president told me to go to Los Angeles, keep my mouth shut, hold my nose, and vote. I can't do it. I can't just be a 'good German.' "