

House Democrats kill resolution to impeach Bush

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Democratic members of the US House of Representatives voted unanimously to kill an impeachment resolution against President Bush introduced by Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich of Ohio.

Kucinich himself participated fully in the farce. He introduced the resolution Monday and read out the 35 articles of impeachment for crimes ranging from the lying pretexts given to the American people for the war in Iraq to torture at the US detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and illegal domestic spying. Then he moved to send the resolution to the House Judiciary Committee, whose chairman John Conyers has long rejected any effort to hold Bush constitutionally accountable. This move will have the effect of burying the bill indefinitely.

The 251-166 margin of the vote, held on a roll call Wednesday, saw all 227 Democrats—including Kucinich and his lone co-sponsor, Robert Wexler of Florida—joined by 24 Republicans move to dispose of the resolution. Voting against were 166 Republicans, who sought to force a debate on impeachment for the purpose of embarrassing the Democratic Party leadership.

After Kucinich introduced the measure Monday and spent more than four hours reading the entire text into the Congressional Record, House Republicans utilized a parliamentary provision to force the clerk of the House to read the text out loud all over again on Tuesday, consuming another four hours and keeping the House in session until after midnight. The purpose was to rub the Democrats' noses in their own refusal to take action to back up their occasional bursts of anti-Bush demagoguery.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi ruled out any impeachment of Bush as soon as the Democrats won control of Congress in November 2006. Impeachment resolutions against Cheney were introduced in May and November of 2007 and killed each time by the Democrats, in the same fashion as the Bush impeachment resolution Wednesday.

There is no question that, unlike Bill Clinton, who was impeached for lying about a private sexual encounter, George W. Bush is guilty of offenses that meet the "high crimes and misdemeanors" standard set by the US Constitution.

The adamant opposition to impeachment proceedings on the part of Pelosi, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and the rest of the Democratic leadership does not stem from a belief that such proceedings would be unpopular. According to public opinion polls, a majority of the American people and an overwhelming majority of Democratic voters favor Bush's impeachment and removal from office.

A public vote in the House of Representatives would, however, find a clear majority of the

Democrats in Congress siding with Bush against the sentiments of their own constituents. The Democratic leadership seeks to block any vote to conceal as much as possible their role as the last line of defense for the Bush administration.

The Democratic leadership opposes impeachment not on legal, but on political and class grounds. They are well aware that the adoption of an impeachment resolution against Bush and Cheney, regardless of the outcome of a Senate trial, would deal a major blow against the White House as an institution and undermine the legitimacy of all Bush's actions as "commander-in-chief," especially in the war in Iraq.

It would also inevitably raise the question of who in Congress was complicit with Bush's criminal conduct over the past seven years—tarring Democrats as well as Republicans, since a majority of Senate Democrats and a large number of House Democrats voted for the Iraq war resolution in 2002. Many other actions listed in Kucinich's articles of impeachment were given near-unanimous support by the Democrats.

More fundamentally, the Democratic Party is a bourgeois party and it seeks to uphold the authority of the bourgeois state, the key political instrument for the defense of the financial aristocracy that controls American society and both the "major" political parties. The Democrats want to replace Bush as chief executive with one of their own, and their rejection of impeachment is one more effort to demonstrate to the ruling class that they will be more "responsible" in their conduct than their Republican opponents (who impeached Bill Clinton as he was ordering bombing raids against the Iraq of Saddam Hussein).

The contrast with the Clinton impeachment is worth exploring, because it demonstrates the spinelessness and hypocrisy of the Democratic Party.

The House Republicans voted to impeach Clinton in December 1998, one month after they had lost seats in a congressional election dominated by the furor over Clinton's lying about his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky. Ignoring the clear message of the election, as well as opinion polls showing popular opposition to impeachment, the House Republicans utilized their narrow majority to put the president on trial before the Senate.

The Democrats regained control of the House in November 2006, in an election dominated by popular hostility to the war in Iraq and to the Bush presidency. Conyers and other Democrats had demanded impeachment hearings when they were in the minority and could not do anything about it. As soon as they became the majority, they abruptly dropped the issue and declared they would have nothing to do with it.

Kucinich plays the role of clown prince in these proceedings. He raised the issue of impeachment of Bush and Cheney both in the House and in the course of his abortive campaign for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, serving as a "left" cover for a political party that opposes the war in Iraq only because it has been a failure, in terms of strengthening the position of US imperialism in the Middle East and giving the US control over vital oil supplies.

The Democratic caucus is less and less willing to indulge in such charades, however. Last November, when Kucinich brought a similar resolution to the floor against Cheney, he was able to enlist 22 co-sponsors, while 86 Democratic congressmen and congresswomen voted to have a debate on the resolution rather than refer it to committee. This time, Kucinich had only one supporter, Wexler, and both he and Kucinich himself joined in the unanimous

Democratic vote to bury the measure.

The articles of impeachment introduced Monday are certainly valid from a legal and constitutional standpoint. Fifteen of the articles relate to the illegal war in Iraq: lying to the American people, waging war on the basis of those lies, drawing up secret plans to seize Iraq's oil reserves, and so on. Five articles relate to the kidnapping, secret detention and torture of prisoners by the military and intelligence agencies. Others relate to domestic abuses of power, including illegal surveillance and wiretapping, the enactment of secret laws, and obstruction of investigations into the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

One article relates to ongoing White House plans to engineer a US war with Iran. Only last month, Conyers sent a letter to Bush warning him that "if you do not obtain the constitutionally required congressional authorization before launching preemptive military strikes against Iran or any other nation, impeachment proceedings should be pursued."

The unanimous rejection of impeachment proceedings by the Democrats shows that this warning was an empty threat. In the event of a unilateral or joint US-Israeli military strike against Iran—which would be accompanied by a media barrage about alleged Iranian "weapons of mass destruction," support for terrorism and "meddling" in Iraq—Congressional Democrats will roll over and play dead, just as they have endorsed or permitted every crime committed by the Bush administration over the past eight years.

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