

Will the Democrats lose their historic opportunity?

by Kathleen Klenetsky

President George Bush is in deep political trouble. Public outrage over his immoral and cowardly handling of the Lithuanian crisis is combining with growing public panic over the collapsed state of the U.S. economy, to produce a politically explosive situation in which Bush's artificially high popularity rates could be coming tumbling down as quickly as the stock market did in October 1987.

But while Bush, and the Republican Party in general, face the prospect of a rout of historic proportions, the Democrats have thus far failed miserably in the task of offering a viable alternative to the administration's economic or strategic policies.

Instead of seizing this historic opportunity to reestablish the old Franklin Roosevelt coalition of the traditional Democratic constituencies—labor, farmers, minorities, independent entrepreneurs—and take back the presidency, the great majority of Democratic office-holders and party officials are either trying to out-Bush Bush—advocating even more abject appeasement of Moscow and Beijing, and harsher levels of austerity—or are throwing their hands up in despair.

It's not just the voters who are abandoning the party, but its leaders as well: Within the last three weeks, two Democratic governors, William O'Neill of Connecticut and Vermont's Madeleine Kunin, have announced that they will not seek reelection, O'Neill reportedly because the \$1 billion tax hike he backed last year has rendered him a political pariah, and Kunin explicitly because of the terrible state of the Vermont economy.

It is a sorry state of affairs, but nonetheless true: Instead of two contending parties, Washington is basically being run by a coalition government of Republicans and Democrats, committed to slight variations of virtually the same shopworn and provably incompetent policies. So concerned are the Democrats to keep their deal with Bush and the Republicans, that they don't even amount to a loyal opposition.

A case in point is the behind-the-scenes antics over the proposal recently put forward by the House Ways and Means Committee chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.), which calls for eliminating the Social Security cost-of-living increase for one year, raising gasoline and income taxes, and slashing

defense outlays. Although supposedly one of the Democrats' "big, new ideas," the austerity scheme was actually worked out beforehand between Rostenkowski and the Bush White House.

This collusion extends so deeply, that Democratic Party hacks in certain areas are actually stymieing efforts to field Democratic candidates. As *EIR* has previously reported, such is the case in Virginia, where the party, despite having scored major victories in the November 1989 elections, decided not to run a candidate against incumbent Republican Sen. John Warner, and has tried desperately to prevent a LaRouche Democrat, Nancy Spannaus, from challenging Warner.

Two recent national party meetings underscore the party's current state of mind. In mid-March, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), formed by the self-styled "centrist" wing of the party, and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) convened separate conferences, presumably to devise party strategy for the coming period.

But nothing of the sort emerged. Not only was no comprehensive program for reversing the depression put forth, but neither meeting could muster anything resembling a battle-plan for electing the next Democratic President. Both meetings gave strong backing to the strategy of Sen. Daniel Moynihan (N.Y.). Not because it charts a sound course for the economy—it offers *no* such course, and, according to Moynihan himself (who says he only wants to protect the assets of the retirement trust fund), it's not intended to. But rather, because it's an ideal partisan ploy.

"A political stroke of genius," declared DNC Chairman Ron Brown of the plan. "The payroll tax burden on average American families needs to be reduced and progressivity restored to the overall tax structure," pronounced the DLC. Ironically, the DLC until now has carefully cultivated the profile of responsible fiscal conservatives, to whom any measure that would increase the deficit would be anathema.

Politics of exclusion

What happened at the DNC meeting goes a long way toward explaining why the party has thus far been incapable of breaking out of its losing streak. The real point of emphasis

at the gathering was placed on devising bigger and better schemes for excluding from the party anyone not interested in supporting the current idiocies of party life.

The muckety-mucks in attendance adopted new rules governing the Democratic presidential nomination process. The most telling of these was the decision to increase the number of votes a candidate must win in a presidential primary or caucus in order to receive delegates. Previously, the threshold was set at 10%, but this was apparently not high enough to keep out dissenting or new voices, so the figure was increased to 15%.

If the Democratic Party's inner circles think that these politics of exclusion are going to help the party's cause—at least as that term was traditionally defined to mean (if not always realized in fact) protecting the interests of the average working Joe, blacks and other minority ethnic groups, small businessmen, etc.—they've got another thing coming.

The party is no longer simply losing supporters: It's hemorrhaging them. The disgust and even hatred of the party among its former leading constituencies is reaching epidemic proportions. The chances of electing a Democratic President appear so remote right now, that, according to party insiders, no potential candidate is even thinking about going out the early caucus and primary states—a sharp break from past practice.

And no wonder! After all, why do you need a Democratic Party, when it has become nearly indistinguishable from the Republicans?

Are voters seriously going to turn to the Democratic Party, when all it offers is the same rubbish as the Republicans? Do they really want the likes of Virginia's Doug Wilder, the first elected black governor, who addressed the DLC meeting on the virtues of his austerity budget, or Sen. George Mitchell, chief sponsor of the revised Clean Air Bill, which will cost millions of jobs and lead to the wholesale shutdown of many American businesses? Do they want a party which nominated Mike Dukakis, who made such a mess out of the Massachusetts state economy that he's lucky he hasn't been lynched, or one that may nominate a Gov. Mario Cuomo, who is currently implementing one of the most draconian, inhumane budgets ever seen in New York State?

The LaRouche factor

No, not by a long shot. Anger at the present leadership's incompetence and corruption is already threatening to blow apart the party's current framework and method of operating.

That can be seen from the growing openness and support being shown toward LaRouche Democratic candidates and programs. While the party leadership scrambles, as it did at the DNC meeting, to erect stronger barriers against LaRouche and like-minded mavericks, the LaRouche movement is drawing new interest and support from those constituencies who feel betrayed by the party, and are looking for an alternative to the warmed-over plabum being dished out

by the party establishment.

Take the case of Texas, deep in the grips of the depression which overwhelmed it in 1983. Although subjected to an intense slander campaign by certain factions of the Democratic Party associated with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), candidates affiliated with the LaRouche movement scored hundreds of thousands of votes in the March 13 Democratic primary.

Enough Texans were drawn by the candidates' message that LaRouche's program for a new scientific and industrial revolution is vital for the survival of the state and the nation, that several LaRouche supporters won their races, while others received upwards of 20, 30, and 40%. Harley Schlanger, who ran for the Democratic nomination to the U.S. Senate, garnered 25% of the vote statewide, despite his having spent less than \$10,000, to his opponent's more than \$700,000.

That was no fluke, as subsequent events have proved. Over the first weekend in April, Texas Democrats held district conventions across the state. Numerous LaRouche candidates were elected as delegates and alternates to the state convention, and a resolution introduced by LaRouche backers, calling on the Bush administration to support Lithuanian independence and to establish full diplomatic ties with Lithuania, was passed in both Senate District 15 (Houston) and Senate District 10 (Tarrant County).

Of special note was the fact that at the Senate District 15 meeting, a resolution on LaRouche was introduced. Instead of the expected attack on LaRouche and his supporters participating in the Democratic Party, the resolution asserted that Democrats "welcome the participation, and presentation of ideas, by the followers of LaRouche," provided they abide by the rules of the party and support the party's nominees.

And if that didn't send a loud enough signal, the chairman of the Resolutions Committee publicly observed that "The LaRouche people have some good ideas," specifically citing the Lithuanian resolution.

LaRouche candidates are getting similar responses in other areas. In Virginia, where Nancy Spannaus is running for John Warner's Senate seat, she has found great receptivity from the farm sector, labor, and black groups—who regard Warner with contempt, and Democratic Party officialdom, with increasing skepticism and distrust.

Spannaus attributes this to the party's refusal to field a candidate—de facto endorsing Warner—and its overall position on economic issues. For instance, she notes that the Democratic Party and the state AFL-CIO both supported the recent shutdown of the Avtex Fibers mill, by Democratic Attorney General Mary Sue Terry, on specious environmental grounds. That plant closing put 700 workers, mostly Democrats, out of their jobs.

"The Democratic Party is going to have to open up to LaRouche's ideas whether it likes it or not," noted one party insider, "or we'll be holding its funeral not too long down the line."