

The presidential campaign: Dems in Bush's clothing

by Kathleen Klenetsky

There's a new game in Washington. It's called, "Will the real Democrat please stand up?" and it was prompted by the fact that the potential Democratic presidential candidates who have stepped forward so far are virtually indistinguishable from George Bush.

With the unique exception of Lyndon H. LaRouche—who, at this writing, is the only formally declared candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, and who is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence as punishment for opposing the immoral and murderous free trade policies of George Bush and the Anglo-American establishment—the other Democratic possibilities seem to be vying with each other to see who can best make himself into a Democratic version of Bush.

The LaRouche campaign released its first campaign pamphlet in early April, and is singular in its commitment to economic growth and ending the ongoing depression. The pamphlet includes LaRouche's "Oasis Plan" to make the deserts bloom, and the strategic perspective is counterposed to Bush's policy of "technological apartheid" and the new world order.

But instead of reviving the pro-growth economic policies associated with such Democratic heroes as Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, the thinking among Democratic Party decision-makers appears to go something like this: If Bush's popularity soared because he bombed Iraq back into the Stone Age, killing hundreds of thousands of people in the process, and despite the hardships which the depression has brought to the United States, then any Democrat who wants to win the presidency should essentially follow Bush's lead. He or she might want to adopt a few "Democratic" trappings, perhaps in the form of some meaningless sops to

the minorities or the elderly, but should otherwise march down the same road to fascism that Bush has blazed.

That is exactly what is happening. Over the past month, the handful of Democratic possibilities who have stepped into the limelight have all placed great stress on their ability to ram austerity down the population's throat, and have suggested that this qualifies them to lead the nation.

Tsongas: another Massachusetts nightmare

This is certainly the case with Paul Tsongas, the former senator from Massachusetts who now practices corporate law in Boston, as well as with Douglas Wilder, the black governor of Virginia, both of whom have taken the initial legal steps necessary to open a presidential campaign. It's equally true of the several "big name" possibilities, such as New York's Gov. Mario Cuomo, Senators Chuck Robb (Va.) and Al Gore (Tenn.), and Rep. Richard Gephardt (Mo.), who are still testing the political waters before deciding whether to dive into the campaign.

Tsongas was expected to officially declare his presidential candidacy sometime in early April. Like the Democrats' 1988 standard-bearer, the ill-fated Michael Dukakis, Tsongas is a Greek-American from Massachusetts, and his platform represents a convergence of Dukakis's technocratism with Bush's gung-ho Teddy Roosevelt Republicanism.

Although he developed a reputation as an ultra-liberal during his tenure in Congress, Tsongas now says he underwent a transformation during his years in the private sector, through serving on the boards of numerous large corporations, and now proudly proclaims himself to be the "best friend Wall Street has ever had."

Tsongas has issued an 82-page campaign document de-

scribing his program, called "The New American Mandate." In it, Tsongas correctly asserts that the collapse of America's manufacturing-industrial base "inevitably means cataclysmic erosion of our standard of living." But the solutions he offers will not only fail to reverse the economic decline; they will actually hasten it, insofar as they are based on an anti-growth hodgepodge of protectionism, environmentalism, austerity, and population control.

Tsongas talks about the need to encourage greater investment in research and development in order to get the economy back on track, but he cannot resist placing a large share of the blame for America's decline on the shoulders of Japan and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe.

"The threat to America today is not only a diminished Soviet Union," he writes. "It is not just Saddam Hussein. It is the threat of a different dimension. It is Japanese, German, Taiwanese, Swiss, French, South Korean, etc. Friends all. But just as capable of reducing us to impotence. They have already begun. The adrenalin that Republicans would call up at will to confront Soviets or Cubans or Sandinistas or East Germans or North Koreans or the Iraqi Republican Guard must be called up to confront our friends. This is war by another playwright. But it's still war."

In other words, President Tsongas will continue the economic warfare against the world's successful economies, which the Bush administration launched.

At home, Tsongas proposes cutting entitlement programs, especially Social Security, and extending the death penalty—a platform on which any Bushie would be proud to run.

In a section on the environment, Tsongas describes himself as an "ardent and committed environmentalist," and proves it by calling for a return to the "stewardship" ethic of Teddy Roosevelt. Elaborating on what this would mean in practice, Tsongas writes that in order to establish the "principle that love of earth is mainstream America, a reflection of the best of us in all of us," the next President should proclaim the goal of "global equilibrium." This, he explains, "means the pursuit of policies and lifestyles that allow the consumption of resources to be consistent with having an inhabitable planet over the generations."

Such a zero-growth state must, by definition, require strict controls on human population growth, which Tsongas has no qualms about. "Nothing would serve the cause of environmental equilibrium as much as population control," he maintains. "No one doubts the inevitable consequences of unlimited population expansion. . . . We Democrats must care. . . . We will be judged in future years by how well and how forcefully we began the drive for a stable world population. In this regard, the New American Mandate is a moral imperative that is worldwide in its responsibility."

Austerity-mongers

Fortunately, Tsongas is not in a position to put his proposals into effect—at least not yet. But the other potential Demo-

cratic presidential candidates are, and their actions manifest the same blind commitment to the no-growth, cut-to-the-bone mentality exhibited by Tsongas.

This is especially apparent in Virginia and New York, where governors Douglas Wilder and Mario Cuomo, rather than admit that they don't have a clue as to how to grow their way out of the depression, are instead trying to make a virtue out of their "fiscally responsible behavior"—i.e., austerity. Both men have taken the axe to their respective state budgets, hacking away at spending for education, the poor, the mentally ill, police, fire-fighters—all the essential elements of a functioning society.

Cuomo's eight years as governor has been marked by massive budget cuts, but this year, what he proposed was so draconian, that the political situation spun out of control. In March, 30,000 angry state workers turned out in front of the governor's office in Albany to protest the latest round of cuts, and Cuomo was forced to call out the police when some demonstrators started breaking windows. To what extent Cuomo's failure to keep the lid on will be seen as a black mark against him by his political patrons—such as Lazard Frères banker Felix Rohatyn—remains to be seen.

Wilder has gone Cuomo one step further in his emulation of the Bush mentality. Not only does he publicly boast of his willingness and ability to inflict deep budget cuts, Wilder has also embraced the death penalty as proof that he's as tough as Bush. During his 16 years as a state legislator, Wilder strongly opposed capital punishment, but abruptly changed his mind when he decided to run for the statehouse.

A 'new Coriolanus'?

All this butchery pales in comparison to another Democratic dark horse, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, who is being bandied about as the "new Coriolanus" by a coterie that includes *New York Times* scribbler William Safire. Where Cuomo, Wilder, and Tsongas offer formulae for slashing domestic budgets and increasing executions, Schwarzkopf can put them to shame in the tough-man contest by pointing to the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis whose murder he oversaw. Whether or not Safire was right when he claimed that the Schwarzkopf-Bush dispute over the timing of the end of the ground war represented the opening shot of the 1992 campaign, Stormin' Norman has made no secret that he harbors political ambitions.

The situation among Democrats heading towards 1992 is bitterly ironic. Despite the triumphalism surrounding the Persian Gulf war, conditions actually could not be riper for a real challenge to Bush. King George has proven himself incapable of stitching together the shattered U.S. economy, and no amount of killing overseas will change that reality. Yet the only candidate who represents a true alternative to Bush sits in a Minnesota jail cell, and not one Democratic Party official has uttered a word of protest about the Bush frameup which put him there.