

Democrats set stage for another election debacle

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Can the Democrats do worse in the presidential candidacy department than they did with Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, and Michael Dukakis? Though that record might seem impossible to outdo, Democratic Party kingmakers appear once again to be steering the party over the cliff.

With just six months to go before the first major milestone in the 1992 presidential primary process—the Iowa caucus—the party is nowhere near fielding a candidate with the potential to defeat George Bush, much less one with the intelligence and courage to make the fundamental changes in U.S. economic, strategic, and cultural policy that are required to rescue the United States from an otherwise certain collapse.

Only two candidates have officially declared so far: the thoroughly incompetent Paul Tsongas, and the internationally respected economist and philosopher Lyndon LaRouche, whom Bush put in jail with the connivance of the Democratic Party's corrupt leadership.

Despite lots of sound and fury coming from Democratic Party quarters over Bush's lack of a domestic agenda and other flaws, Democratic officialdom appears quite willing to let the President go his merry way without a serious challenge.

Just this past June, top Democratic Party officials and advisers sat down with a gaggle of potential presidential candidates at Pamela Harriman's lush estate in the hunt country of Virginia, ostensibly to devise a strategy for unseating Bush come November.

Attendees at the meeting uniformly agreed that the Democrats now had a good shot at capturing the White House, since the collapsing economy was making Bush politically vulnerable.

Since then, the economy has worsened, Bush's popularity has fallen, and the American electorate is growing unhap-

py about the direction the country has taken. Yet, rather than spurring the Democrats to produce a serious alternative to the President, these developments have apparently led the party to commit mass suicide.

Dropping like flies

The Democratic presidential field is now littered with corpses. In July, one of the party's favorites, Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), flatly declared that he would not be a candidate. "I am convinced that my greatest contribution [to defeating Bush] will be made not as a presidential candidate, [but] helping to shape, define, and advance the Democratic message," Gephardt, who had been a candidate in 1988, wrote in a letter to his House colleagues.

In August, Sen. Jay Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.), who had been touted as one of the party's best hopes for 1992, bowed out of the race. He claimed that he has not had adequate time to prepare for "a Rockefeller presidency that meets my own high standards."

Although he still is pursuing his presidential ambitions—he is campaigning in New Hampshire and is expected to formally announce his candidacy in a few weeks—Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder's ongoing tussle with Sen. Chuck Robb (D-Va.) over tapes of his conversations has seriously undercut his chances. Wilder received another blow Aug. 14 when one of his key aides, press spokesman Laura Dillard, resigned her post, on the grounds that Wilder was spending too much time and attention on his presidential campaign and not enough on the state he was elected to govern. Reportedly, other key Wilder appointees share Dillard's complaint.

It should be emphasized that neither Gephardt's and Rockefeller's decisions, nor Wilder's political troubles, represent any great loss to the country. All three belong to the so-called "new paradigm" Democrats: i.e., people who bear

the party label, but have no more use than do the Republicans for the best aspects of the party's heritage as spokesman for the interests of labor, minorities, farmers, and the other productive elements of U.S. society that have been sacrificed on the altar of the "post-industrial society."

Rockefeller is a good example: The policies he was sounding out as part of his presidential platform—among them, a balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution, stringent cost-containment in health care, and a tax break for families with children that would be funded by stealing money from the elderly—could have been lifted straight from the Republican "how-to-impose-austerity" manuals and packaged with a little Democratic rhetoric.

Wilder, who is black, trumpets himself as a "fiscal conservative," and has enthusiastically endorsed the death penalty—which, before setting his sights on the White House, he firmly opposed.

'New paradigm' Democrats

With Rockefeller and Gephardt out of the running, and Wilder on the shoals, has the picture improved? Not by a long shot. The next string of would-be candidates coming into view is equally as bad, if not worse.

The spotlight has now focused on Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton and Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin, neither of whom has demonstrated any inkling of how to deal effectively with the crises now overwhelming the country.

Sporting a super-liberal reputation, Harkin has distinguished himself in the Senate for proposing legislation that would ostensibly "save the family farm" through taking millions of acres out of agricultural production, which has been estimated would hike consumer food prices by nearly 25%.

Consistent with his commitment to slashing U.S. agricultural output, Harkin is also a big booster of population control programs abroad.

He also is one of Israel's most shameless apologists in Congress, and has repeatedly insisted that the U.S. should not take an even-handed approach to the Israel-Arab conflict. In a recent discussion with reporters, Harkin declared that Israeli settlements on the West Bank were not an obstacle to peace. "That is ridiculous on its face," he said. "The biggest obstacle is the lack of any will on the part of other countries to take off the boycott [of Israel] and sit down and negotiate with Israel."

Is this what the United States needs to restore its moral core?

Then there's Bill Clinton, whose blow-dried coiffeur suggests hours spent with a hairdresser every morning, and whose alleged extra-marital frolics have been the cause of much scandal in his home state.

Clinton is the archetypical "new paradigm" Democrat, a technocrat whose pathetic solution to the country's economic ills is to cut welfare costs by collecting more child support from wayward fathers.

Until Aug. 15, when he announced he was setting up a presidential exploratory committee, Clinton chaired the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), a gaggle of Bush-style Democrats whose major issues have included proposals for national voluntary service, whereby every high school student who requires a loan to attend college must first do some form of community service, at slave-labor wages.

Sen. Al Gore (D-Tenn.), another unsuccessful candidate back in 1988, also has his eye on the White House. A booster of radical environmentalism, population control, and a cut-off of technology to the Third World, Gore has received the unofficial backing of Britain's loony Prince Charles—a sure sign that there is something seriously wrong with his policies. Although Gore says he has not made up his mind whether he will run, he has made several unmistakable moves in that direction, including demanding an investigation into the "October Surprise,"—i.e., the charge that the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign secretly negotiated with the Khomeini regime to hold the U.S. hostages in Iran until after Carter was defeated.

If none of these candidacies gel, there is always New York Gov. Mario Cuomo. Claiming that he has no interest in campaigning for the presidency, Cuomo nevertheless takes great pains to criss-cross the country speaking out about national and international politics.

Over the last few weeks, Cuomo has given a series of speeches that would be inexplicable outside the context of the presidential race. In one, an address to the executive committee of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Aug. 9, Cuomo charged that "right now, the Democrats do not have an agenda for America," and then proceeded to lay out a series of initiatives the Democrats should take.

But the sorry state of New York's economy, which Cuomo has exacerbated by emphasizing austerity and budget cutting, would be an albatross around his candidacy, should he decide to take the plunge.

Meaningless exercise

There is some speculation that the Democrats have allowed themselves to be so lackadaisical about mounting a campaign because they believe Bush will eventually collapse under his own failed policies, leaving the White House wide open to whatever candidate the Democrats wind up nominating.

Pundits have also cited Bush's recent hints that he may not run for reelection at all because of health problems, as justification for the Democrats' dithering.

Whether any of this is true or not is beside the point. The party's real crime is not that it hasn't mounted an effective challenge to Bush, but that its programs are just as bad as Bush's are. Until the Democrats choose a candidate with the courage and intelligence to throw out the underlying political and economic assumptions of both the Democratic and Republican parties, a Democratic presidential campaign will be a meaningless exercise.