

Counterpunch

A Report from the Capital

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The Marketplace of Ideas

Raising Money with the "New Democrats"

The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) has always had a knack for raising money. Back in late 1992, at a dinner held to honor its former chairman and then president-elect, Bill Clinton, the DLC took in \$2.6 million. A few sponsors of the \$15,000-a-plate affair were the American Bankers Association, the Tobacco Institute, Merrill Lynch, Coca-Cola and Occidental Petroleum.

The DLC champions the middle class and berates "special interests," but its *raison d'être*—and the key to its financial success—is catering to the ideological needs of business. According to Ellen Miller of the Center for Responsive Politics, it's like the old question of which came first, the chicken or the egg. "The type of donors that give money [to the DLC] are expecting something in return, in this case favorable policies from an influential institution," she says. "And they [the DLC] are able to get money from these corporations because of the positions they take."

The link between the Council's finances and its ideology is exposed in its current fundraising campaign, which is detailed in recent memorandums obtained by *Counterpunch*. The documents also display the base ethical standards of the Council, which proposes that prominent DLC elected officials—including Bill Clinton, VP Al Gore and Georgia Senator Sam Nunn—hit up corporate donors who stand to gain from their solicitors' future decisions.

Founded in 1985 by conservative Southern Democrats, the DLC's first mission was to crush the influence within the Party of blacks, unionists, the poor and other undesirables. Four years later, having largely achieved that goal, the Council established the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) to promote its "New Democrat" ideas.

A 21-member Board of Trustees provides most of the PPI's budget. Board members, who play a significant role in policy formulation, include five investment bankers, three real estate barons, a Louisiana socialite, a leading contributor to the Republican Party, and officials from Coca-Cola, Gilman Paper Co. and the Mars candy empire.

A key issue for the PPI last year was the battle for NAFTA, which it promoted in a series of position papers and in a corporate-financed lobbying campaign. Institute vice chair Al From was especially pleased that debate on the trade pact provoked a split between the Clinton administration and organized labor, the PPI's *bête noire*.

A current Institute priority is "two-years-and-out" welfare reform, which offers job training to welfare recipients and then boots them from the public rolls if they fail to find work. Legislation offered by "New Democrat" Rep. Dave McGurdy would pay for said job training by cutting off Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid to *legal* immigrants.

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A Whaling We Will Go

VP Al-hab in Secret Pact With Norway

To appease the Big Three auto makers, the Clinton administration asked only voluntary compliance with new federal fuel emission standards. When the sugar lobby complained, the government okayed continued farming in the Florida Everglades. Bowing to the timber industry, the Clintonites approved logging in spotted-owl habitats.

Now, in its biggest sellout of the mainstream environmental movement, the administration has caved in to the mighty Oslo fishing lobby and will apparently back a Norwegian plan that paves the way for resumed commercial whaling. The chief U.S. backer of the proposal—to be discussed at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, held in late May as *Counterpunch* went to press—is the Environmental Vice President, Al Gore.

In his stirring 1992 eco-thriller, *Earth in the Balance*, Gore emotionally recalled the plight of three whales trapped under the ice of the Beaufort Sea. "Television networks from four continents came to capture their poignant struggle for air," wrote Gore. "After several elaborate schemes failed, a huge icebreaker from the Soviet Union cut a path through the ice for the two surviving whales. Along with millions of others, I [was] delighted to see them go free."

Once in office, Gore was less moved by the plight of the whales. The U.S. last year threatened but failed to impose sanctions on Oslo after Norwegian fisherman harpooned 157 minke, breaking the IWC's 1986 moratorium on all commercial whaling. Gore vigorously opposed sanctions, arguing that Norway should be given another chance to show "good faith."

Gore and Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland have held several meetings to plot strategy for the IWC meeting, including a crucial tryst held at the White House last Sept. 29. The encounter between these two prominent world leaders—chronicled in a leaked transcript provided to *Counterpunch* by D.C. activists—opened with what must surely rate as one of history's most banal exchanges.

Gore: Sorry I'm late, but we've been behind since announcing our clean air initiative with our auto makers.

Brundtland: I realize your schedule is tight. But it's just this type of initiative we need at our upcoming conference on consumption and development—we would welcome your presence.

Gore: Thank you. By the way, congratulations on your re-election. I'm impressed how you timed the Middle East accord breakthrough to coincide with the election! [laughter] Seriously, your efforts in achieving this breakthrough deserves real credit—it sets a superb example for the rest of the world. I'm sure you received many compliments at the U.N. General Assembly. I think President Clinton's speech was also very well received.

Brundtland: Thank you. His speech was the first American President's speech I could have given.

Gore: I was especially pleased he included environmental issues.

Brundtland: I agree. Your speech at the sustainable development conference was also very good.

Gore: As was yours at Harvard—we were all very impressed.

The two ecologists then got down to business, with Gore sternly informing Brundtland that the U.S., in principle, remains opposed to commercial whaling. However, added the flexible VP, the Clinton administration would be willing to support the Revised Management Scheme (RMS), a Norwegian-backed scheme which would authorize limited commercial whaling and set quotas for certain species. With U.S. backing, the IWC is expected to approve a proposal that lays the groundwork for a formal adoption of the RMS a few years down the road.

Brundtland: You cannot support whaling. I accept that, but can we, in good faith, expect frank and open discussions at the IWC?

Gore: Absolutely.

Brundtland: We cannot work...to achieve an RMS, but then allow someone using legal loopholes to block acceptance and retain the moratorium.

Gore: Let me repeat. We need trust to make this work. We will enter this process with you in good faith, and will not pull a fast one at the end. We will continue to give you a candid assessment of the issues and also the pathway to proceed in resolving the issue.

If the RMS goes forward, Japan, Iceland and other nations will also move to resume commercial whaling. Furthermore, enforcing quotas is virtually an impossible task, as whaling takes place at sea. Russian officials admitted this year that Soviet fleets routinely violated IWC kill quotas for three decades, saying that the "hunting of protected species, whaling at prohibited times in prohibited areas, extermination of entire herds and even populations...all were commonplace."

While objectionable, Brundtland's posture on whaling is at least comprehensible; she is acting to win the support of her nation's important fishing communities. The U.S. posture is more bizarre, given that no domestic sector actively supports whaling.

Two possible explanations for U.S. spinelessness are Gore's close friendship with Brundtland, whom he met at the U.N.'s 1992 "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro, and, perhaps of greater import, the \$50,000 monthly retainer Norway is paying for the lobbying services of Akin, Gump, the D.C. law firm whose ability to work wonders with the Clintonites was detailed in the last issue of *Counterpunch*.

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