

The Democrats' Path to Victory

The public demand for progressive politics is growing stronger

BY DAVID MOBERG

VOTERS ARE LIKELY TO choose the next president primarily on economic issues, especially if the financial crises deepen. But they will also decide the election based on concerns about the war in Iraq and, more broadly, America's place in the world.

On both counts—the pocketbook and the globe—Democrats hold an advantage. But to retain that advantage, Democrats will need to redefine the terms of debate on America's global role.

That's happening in small, if inadequate, ways on both the war in Iraq and trade issues. The danger is that the Democrats will defensively hedge against the inevitable Republican attack machine on foreign policy and pander to their newly generous corporate financial backers on trade. They would then fail to connect with voters' deep sense of dissatisfaction, not just with Bush, but with longer-term trends in American foreign policy.

Most Americans don't think the administration's global and domestic policies are working. "Democrats have not yet found their voice as agents of change, except perhaps on Iraq," write Democracy Corps political strategists Stan Greenberg, Al Quinlan and James Carville. "If 2008 is to bring a tidal wave, Democrats and progressives must become more fully the voice of what is wrong with these times. It is not enough to be anti-Iraq and anti-Bush."

Democracy Corps polling supports this populist reading of the electorate. Given a list of phrases that reflect both conservative and progressive explanations, the top two choices among people who think the country is off course were "big businesses get whatever they want in Washington" (40 percent) and "leaders have forgotten the middle class" (38 percent).

But Democracy Corps also reports that the populist inclinations of Democrats and

independents diverge, giving Republicans a political wedge opportunity. Democratic voters were most concerned about Iraq spending, healthcare inaction, and job loss to China and India. Independents cared most about unprotected borders, oil dependence and job loss. Thus, immigration emerges as a potential political problem for Democratic candidates, even though most Americans reject draconian crackdowns on immigrants.

Current debates about Iraq and globalization—in Congress and among the presidential candidates—show that Democrats have failed to take advantage of this progressive shift in public opinion.

Iraq—now spilling over to encompass

Iran—remains by far the most important global issue for voters. Roughly two out of every three Americans oppose the war in Iraq, and three out of five want the troops out within a year, according to CNN/Opinion Research. What's more, a solid majority wants out even if the military has not restored order, according to a September *Washington Post*/ABC polls.

People now trust Democrats more than Republicans on the war, but 55 percent still said that congressional Democrats had not gone far enough in opposing it, according to the same poll.

In the presidential race, the top three Democrats—Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and former Sen. John Ed-



STAN HONDA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Union workers demonstrate against a free trade agreement between Peru and the United States in front of the International Labor Organization's headquarters in Lima on Aug. 7.



EITAN ABRAMOVICH/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

wards—have all committed to starting the withdrawal of troops, saying they would leave residual forces in Iraq and the surrounding area, possibly through the end of their first term. Edwards argues that, unlike Clinton, he would end combat operations within a year, and Obama insists he would leave a smaller, less ambitious residual force than Clinton. But New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson has made a bid for anti-war voters, calling for prompt and complete withdrawal (as has long-time war opponent Rep. Dennis Kucinich).

Clinton's opponents have criticized her vote for the Kyl-Lieberman amendment, which declares Iran's Revolutionary Guards a terrorist group and sets the stage for Bush to attack Iran. In response, Clinton said she did not support a "rush to war," but did not rule out an attack on Iran.

OVER THE PAST five years, the public has steadily opposed the reliance on U.S. military strength over multilateral diplomacy for security. Three-fourths of Americans favor international cooperation over either withdrawing from international affairs or being the top world leader or dominant power, according to the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy (PIPA). And nearly as many think that unilateral action against terrorism just makes the United States a bigger terrorist target. According to PIPA's research, Americans overwhelmingly think that goodwill of other countries to-

ward the United States is important but that the world views the country negatively because it dislikes American policies—not American values.

Republicans consistently beat Democrats in the polls on who would ensure a strong military and, by declining margins, on who can best protect national security or fight terrorists. After all, Republicans are adept at creating a culture of fear about foreign threats. And the military-industrial complex continues to exercise tremendous influence.

"I can't imagine any president of either party standing up to the extreme powerful interests of the Pentagon and CIA in any effective way," says Chalmers Johnson, author of *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*.

But on fundamental issues, Americans say they want a radically different foreign policy. Democrats need to emphasize that abandoning militarily aggressive policies and working cooperatively with other nations will make Americans more secure.

Granted, as a woman, Hillary Clinton faces biased questions about whether she can be a forceful leader. But it's time to make the case that a president can be tough without being belligerent and stupid. Trying to distinguish themselves from both Bush and Clinton, Obama and Edwards argue for diplomatic talks with Iran, an offer of incentives as well as economic sanctions, and less aggressiveness (ruling out ambitions for "regime change," ac-

cording to Obama, or "preventive war," according to Edwards).

"An unapologetic, pragmatic, progressive foreign policy would come across more appealing than desperate attempts to be appear tough," says Stephen Zunes, a foreign policy expert at the University of San Francisco. "If you surrender the whole basis of debate to Republicans, rather than change the terms of the debate, you'll seem weaker."

DEMOCRATS NEED TO change the terms of debate on globalization, as well. Most Americans see globalization as somewhat positive, especially for consumers. But increasingly, the public—including educated workers—sees globalization as a threat to U.S. jobs, incomes and economic security, and as a boon to corporations.

More than two out of every three Americans view trade as harmful for U.S. workers' job security, and 60 percent call it detrimental for job creation, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs reported last spring. Even 59 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say that foreign trade has been bad for the U.S. economy, according to a late September NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll.

Many of the architects of Bill Clinton's NAFTA-style approach to globalization—such as former economic adviser Gene Sperling and former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers—now acknowledge that those policies have hurt American workers, contributing to inequality as a tiny elite captures virtually all of the nation's income and productivity growth.

Around the world, opposition grows to the U.S. brand of corporate globalization. In October, the United States used last minute threats of economic reprisal to swing Costa Rican public opinion in favor of ratifying the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Yet key Democrats in Congress continue to push for Bush-negotiated trade deals, even as they begin shifting their positions on trade. Reps. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and Sandy Levin (D-Mich.) negotiated with the Bush administration to include provisions in the Peruvian free trade agreement to protect labor rights and the environment with enforcement through standard trade tribunals.

Congressional critics, such as Rep. Phil Hare (D-Ill.), question why Rangel and Levin were in a rush to approve the Peru

agreement. It contains all of the heavily criticized NAFTA rules on investor rights, government procurement and other corporate protectionism.

Proponents of labor rights disagree about how enforceable the labor and environmental protections may be, given the wording of the Peru treaty. AFL-CIO experts believe that the treaty's reference to the international labor organization's core labor rights includes the more specific and enforceable ILO conventions. But Columbia law professor Mark Barenberg argues that in several regards the Peru agreement is "even worse than existing [trade and labor rights] law." Tom Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, has few doubts: "We are encouraged by assurances that the labor provisions cannot be read to require compliance with the conventions."

While some unions—such as Unite Here and the Teamsters—opposed the Peru agreement, others withheld support. Environmental groups had a similar mixed sense of a narrow achievement within a flawed overall framework.

Labor unions, environmentalists and other progressive groups are gearing up for more aggressive opposition to pending free trade agreements with Panama, South Korea and Colombia, which has the world's worst record of violence against trade unions. The Bush administration is promoting the Colombian agreement as a way to combat Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's influence in Latin America—swaying at least a few Democratic legislators, like New York Reps. Elliot Engel and Gregory Meeks.

Democrats need to offer more than slightly improved trade deals or even strengthened trade adjustment assistance for displaced workers to make the global economy work for American workers.

Kenneth Scheve, professor of political science at Yale, and Matthew Slaughter, professor of economics at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, write in the July/August issue of *Foreign Affairs* that even workers who do not lose their jobs will lose income in a globalized economy, and that consequently the federal government should change the tax code to redistribute income from the wealthy to low- and moderate-income workers.

"The issues are way beyond whether we have this or that free trade agreement, or how do we make the deal OK," says Economic Policy Institute founder Jeff Faux, author of *The Global Class War*. "The

idea that you can fool around with these trade agreements and get better language doesn't deal with the larger questions of the United States' financial situation or the question of who are these corporations, and who do they represent?"

Among the leading presidential candi-

agreements, distancing herself slightly from her husband's hallmark action.

"I think we've seen a huge shift, if you think back to the days when Al Gore was the spokesman for NAFTA against Ross Perot, compared to now, when all of the Democratic candidates are critical to some

As a woman, Hillary Clinton faces biased questions about whether she can be a forceful leader. But a president can be tough without being belligerent and stupid.

dates, Edwards has most forcefully criticized corporate globalization and opposed all pending trade deals. Obama made a plant closing as a result of production shift overseas a major part of his Senate campaign, but on the presidential campaign trail he has not been a consistent or profound critic of globalization. (Unlike Edwards, Obama supported the Peru trade deal, even as all three leading candidates announced opposition to the Korean pact and earlier opposed the Central American Free Trade Agreement.) Clinton has called for a "time out" on trade deals and a periodic reassessment of NAFTA and other

degree of trade policies," says Sarah Anderson, global economy project director at the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank. "But we don't have a commitment to complete overhaul." And the rebound in corporate contributions to Democrats raises the specter of increased business influence on a new Democratic administration.

The American people appear ready for an approach to foreign policy and globalization that serves working people more than corporate elites. But it's not clear yet that the eventual Democratic standard-bearer will seize that opportunity. ■

freepress.net.' At the bottom right is the Free Press logo, which consists of the word 'freepress' in a lowercase, sans-serif font, followed by a stylized star and a swoosh, and the website address 'www.freepress.net' below it." data-bbox="361 511 631 911"/>

JUNK NEWS IS MAKING US SICK.

Trivial. Cheap. Often just plain wrong. "Junk news" is hurting America. TV journalism has become a national joke - at a time when we face life or death decisions on war, health care and the environment.

Now Big Media want to "Super Size." They're lobbying to change the rules so they can gobble up even more local TV, newspaper and radio outlets in your community.

America needs a more diverse media diet. With local ingredients, quality journalism, and fresh points of view.

Help put quality media back on the menu.
Visit freepress.net.

freepress 
www.freepress.net

BY EMILY UDELL

Dark Side of Russia's Rainbow

Rainbow banners. Colorful costumes. Thumping music. Waving politicians. These are some modern-day trappings of a typical gay pride parade in any major U.S. city. But it's a far cry from the scene of this year's pride march in Moscow, where participants were

ridiculed, beaten and arrested for daring to demonstrate publicly in a country where homosexuality was a crime until 1993.

Among those arrested this year was Nikolai Alexeyev, a founder of the gay rights organization Gay Russia. In the past two years, Alexeyev helped organize the first pride marches in Moscow, knowing he would face opposition from the hundreds of people who turned out to protest the events. The city government refused to issue official permits for the demonstrations, citing concerns for public safety, and the 29-year-old lawyer was beaten and swiftly detained by police both years.

It wasn't the first time Alexeyev was punished for trying to bring gay issues to the table. In college in Moscow, administrators silenced Alexeyev when he tried to present academic work on homophobia. But despite political, legal and religious pressures, he has worked to combat prejudice and secure legal and political protections for Russia's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. He says his public fight for equality has made significant progress for the LGBT community and other minority groups in his country since Gay Russia's founding two years ago.

In These Times caught up with Alexeyev in October when he was in the United States taking part in several events—including a march commemorating the death of Matthew Shepard—with the Chicago-based activist group Gay Liberation Network.

What made you decide to become a public figure in the fight for gay rights in your country?

In the beginning I was studying law at Lomonosov Moscow State University. At that time I was trying to write a doctorate on the issues of gay rights and I was denied the right to present it as a document of scientific work at the university because of discrimination. It led to a lawsuit against the university, which is still pending at the European Court of Human Rights. I still published this work as two books. After that, I realized that it wouldn't be possible to change things in Russia just by writing and I decided I should be involved in more activist work and try to bring changes for LGBT rights.

What are some of the legal, political and religious obstacles you face in advancing the rights of the LGBT community in Russia?

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Russia in 1993. From 1993 to 2005, the topic was mostly out of the political sphere. Gays were not really fighting for their rights for the last decade. Not until 2005, when our organization Gay Russia appeared, did it start to come back on the political agenda.

Legally, apart from the fact that homosexuality is not a crime anymore, there are absolutely no rights for same-sex couples. There is no ban on discrimination. There is no anti-hate crime legislation.

The Russian Orthodox Church, which is very powerful in Russia and is where the

majority of the Russian population goes, is fighting against homosexuals and they are always talking against, for example, gay parades or any other public appearance of homosexuals. Politicians are also following this stance and they are talking against any public appearance of, as they call it, the "propaganda of homosexuality."

There were several attempts to bring a bill to the parliament to forbid the "propaganda of homosexuality," which failed, but, from time to time, it is discussed at the political level.

I understand that some people who were representing the church participated in the protests against the pride parades that you helped organize.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church went out in the streets—both last year and this year—to protest against the participants in the gay parade. We had priests who came in BMWs of the latest possible model to the city hall where we organized the rally. They came to bless the protesters, the neofascists and the nationalists. They were there on the streets in their robes and crosses. It really was a terrible face of the Russian Orthodox Church. And at the same time, the Church never admits officially that it went on the streets like that to protest against the gay pride parade.

Have any advances been made in establishing legal structures for dealing with hate crimes against homosexuals?

This is a really big problem in Russia right now. We see this happening in Moscow and St. Petersburg, where people are beaten up by protesters or by the neofascists. Usually these people get very short sentences—three or four years for hooliganism and not for beating people or for murder. Usually the state and police are trying to represent it as just a murder or an attempt to rob someone. The state is not really doing much to fight against