

Gore's Campaign in Total Disarray

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Less than two months before the Democratic Party Presidential nominating convention in Los Angeles, Vice President Al Gore, the presumed Presidential nominee, has completely overhauled his campaign organization, firing his campaign chief, Tony Coehlo, and bringing in Secretary of Commerce William Daley as his replacement. While some Democratic Party politicians have greeted the Daley appointment with sighs of relief, his 11th-hour arrival is but one more piece of evidence that the Gore campaign is in deep trouble. One persisting question is: Why did Gore wait so long to dump Coehlo? The former California Congressman, who was forced to quit the House after he was caught kiting hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of checks at the House Bank, has been under investigation by several Federal grand juries and government agencies, for a variety of crimes, while working in various governmental posts. And Coehlo's legal problems had been the subject of nearly constant media attention for months.

The short answer to the question, is that the problem with the Gore campaign starts from the top—with the candidate himself! And William Daley, the brother of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and the son of the late, legendary Chicago Mayor and Democratic powerhouse, however competent he may be, is faced with a near-impossible task of putting Al Gore back together again, after months of gaffes, policy blunders, and failed "reinventions." One top Democratic campaign veteran described Al Gore as "snake-bit," and told the *Washington Times* on June 20, that unless Gore succeeded in improving his rotten reputation by the Fourth of July, his campaign might be finished even before the convention.

Indeed, Gore's polling numbers continue to plunge. As of mid-June, polls showed the Vice President to be 10% behind the presumed Republican nominee, George W. Bush. And Bush has gained the most ground with core Democratic Party constituents: senior citizens, young voters, Catholics, and voters from the Northeast.

Even the appointment of Daley was done in such a way as to further alienate organized labor, another must-win group of voters. Daley was the Clinton Administration's point-man for the House vote in support of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for China, and is also responsible for the Administration's push for China's membership in the World Trade Organization. This placed Daley at odds with AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and other labor officials. Gore failed to alert Sweeney in advance of his plan to appoint Daley

to head his campaign, and when the news was made public, the AFL-CIO bosses reportedly hit the roof. Gore met with Sweeney and other top labor officials the next day, and tried to smooth over their anger. Ultimately, the AFL-CIO will remain committed to the Gore candidacy (it endorsed Gore for President, under immense pressure, including from the Department of Justice and the FBI, last year), but unless Sweeney et al. can conduct a full-scale mobilization on Election Day, Gore's fate is even further sealed. Furthermore, the United Auto Workers, one of the biggest member unions of the AFL-CIO, refused to join the Federation in endorsing Gore, and top officials have said they may bolt from the Democratic Party altogether, and throw their support behind Ralph Nader and the Green Party!

Gore's biggest fiasco, which could have the most dramatic impact on Election Day, is his continuing hysterical insistence that duly elected convention delegates who support the candidacy of Lyndon LaRouche, be excluded from the Los Angeles nominating convention on Aug. 14-17. LaRouche won 22% of the vote in Arkansas's primary election, and the 53,000 LaRouche voters are, as of now, being disenfranchised by the Democratic National Committee's chairman Joe Andrew. LaRouche commands strong support among many core Democratic constituents, particularly African-American workers, and the Gore-ordered anti-LaRouche antics could lead these voters to look elsewhere or stay home in November.

Congressmen Fear Landslide Defeat

Gore's sinking ship could also spell doom for Congressional Democrats, who stand on the verge of taking back control of the House of Representatives, and, perhaps, even the Senate, in November. But, if Gore is defeated by a landslide in November, the Democrats will in all likelihood lose that golden opportunity. Indicative of the state of panic among leading Congressional Democrats, on June 15, House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt (Mo.) and Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (S.D.) met with President Clinton to demand that he take some action to roll back gasoline prices. The two legislators argued forcefully that the backlash against the White House, if there was no Presidential action to reduce gas prices at the pump, would sink any hopes of a Democratic Congressional majority. The next day, President Clinton released 1 million barrels of oil from the government's Strategic Petroleum Reserve, in the first intervention to force down gasoline prices. That move may stave off such a voter backlash over fuel costs, but it does very little for Al Gore.

Gore's dismal performance can only be dealt with by a revolt from within the Democratic Party to dump him as the nominee, either prior to the convention, or through an open fight at the nominating convention in August. So far, while there has been a good deal of grass-roots carping at Gore's losing ways, aside from the mobilization of the LaRouche faction of the Democratic Party, no concerted effort has yet been mounted to dump Gore.