

Bush: on the slippery slope to political doom

by Kathleen Klenetsky

President George Bush could barely suppress his glee at the press conference he hastily convened after the Senate sustained his veto of a bill that would have allowed Chinese students to remain in the United States to escape political persecution by the butchers of Beijing. Having suffered a stunning setback in the House, where his veto was overridden by a whopping 390-25 vote, Bush was able to browbeat and blackmail the Senate into backing up his immoral position.

"I'm very, very pleased with the results on the Hill today," Bush jubilantly proclaimed to the media. "It gives me the confidence that I can go forward the way I think is correct here."

Bush's smugness promises to be short-lived. If he was able to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat on this particular issue, it was at a terrible political cost.

In purely pragmatic terms, the President was forced to spend tremendous political capital to get his way. "Armtwisting is civilized behavior, compared to the tactics Bush's people used to knock the Senate into line," one Washington observer noted. "What they did was more like knee-capping and leg-breaking."

The President also made the issue one of personal loyalty to him—but that trick can be used only so many times. Despite these heavy-handed tactics, only 69 out of 535 senators and congressmen voted for Bush's position.

More importantly, Bush now stands indelibly labeled, in the minds of most Americans and indeed most of the world's population, as a traitor to the American ideals of freedom and human dignity, and a staunch opponent, along with China's murderous old guard, of the revolutionary upsurge sweeping the globe.

The honeymoon is over

Bush may have saved himself from a devastating political defeat this time around, but the China issue is not about to

go away. Another confrontation between the President and Congress will occur in early February, when several Democratic proposals to slap sanctions on Beijing will be debated. Furthermore, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is reportedly preparing to haul Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger in, to question him whether his ties to Kissinger Associates, with its myriad business deals with the Chinese regime, played a part in the administration's consistent kowtowing to Beijing.

If anything, the Senate vote on the China bill was the last gasp of the bipartisan cooperation which Bush enjoyed during his first year in office. His second year will be a very different experience. A host of crises, which the Bush crew is utterly incapable of dealing with, is looming, and the political sharks are hungrily beginning to circle.

The economy is clearly Bush's most vulnerable point. It is no longer possible to obscure the fact that the U.S. economy is in depression, and that a massive financial blowout is imminent.

For Bush, the bad economic news is multiplying like rabbits. One day before his triumphal press conference on the China vote, William Seidman, chairman of the Resolution Trust Corp. that was set up to handle the S&L bailout, testified to Congress that the bailout will require more than the \$50 billion figure the Bush team has clung to. Two days later, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan warned that foreign capital is set to flee the United States, which eventuality will bring the economy down in a flash.

Bush is caught in a real Catch-22: He needs to push up interest rates, to keep capital at home; and he needs to lower interest rates, to stave off a deflationary collapse. His current economic policies offer no way out of this morass, and unless he shifts within the next weeks and months, he will be "Hooverized," both by objective economic conditions, and by the

political process.

Bush's vulnerability on economics is emerging as a major target of opportunity for his political opponents. As Clark Clifford, the Democratic Party elder statesman, told an *EIR* correspondent late last year, the crumbling economy will be Bush's political undoing.

Already, Bush's opposition is turning the economy against him. The first salvo was fired by Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N. Y.), who has given the administration a big headache with his proposal to roll back Social Security taxes and change the accounting practice, employed by the Reagan and Bush administrations, that permits the Social Security trust fund to be treated as general revenue, even though it is supposed to be reserved solely to pay benefits to beneficiaries.

The effect of this practice, of course, has been to hide the real size of the deficit. In an appearance on CBS-TV's "Face the Nation" Jan. 21, Moynihan denounced the practice as a "scam" and "almost illegal."

The Bush crew is strenuously resisting Moynihan's idea. If implemented, it would not only ring the death knell for Bush's proposal to reduce the capital gains tax; it would also force the President to seek a significant tax hike, both to compensate for the loss in Social Security revenue, as well as to meet the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit-reduction requirements, which would automatically become much more severe once the Social Security fund was removed from general revenues.

Although the Democratic leadership has distanced itself publicly from Moynihan's proposal, Bush is still squirming—with reason. New York Gov. Mario Cuomo has endorsed the initiative—no doubt with an eye on the 1992 elections—and support for it is reportedly growing among rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans on the Hill.

Political analysts from both sides of the aisle say that the Moynihan gambit has the White House extremely nervous. Republican pundit Kevin Phillips told the *Washington Times* that it "could go through the Republicans like a hot knife through butter." Robert Shapiro, of the Democratic Party-linked Progressive Policy Institute, said the tax cut "is going to become a cutting issue for the Democrats. That's a fight the President can't win."

A similar reading came from former Reagan adviser Lyn Nofziger. The Moynihan proposal "is the best political issue to come along in a long time. If [the Democrats] play it right, it can make a hell of a difference in the 1990 campaign. . . . Two-thirds of the House Republicans are inclined to support the Moynihan initiative if it comes in that way."

The Moynihan proposal is just the beginning of the brawl which will dominate administration-congressional relations during the coming year. The pressures stemming from the intensifying economic collapse will make what has become an extremely messy and vitriolic process much more so, and Bush is sure to be damaged in the process. Given that 1990 is an election year, with every House

seat up for grabs, there will be no limits to the anti-Bush politicking that will unfold.

Trouble is brewing for Bush on other fronts, as well. Congress is prepared for a showdown with him on the Clean Air bill and child-care, while his foreign policy record is coming under increasing criticism. Ironically, even the invasion of Panama—which Republican National Committee chairman Lee Atwater hailed as a "political jackpot" for Bush and the Republicans—is turning into a political liability. The "hot tamale" incident in Panama has made the Bushmen look like complete idiots, and Bush's opponents are zeroing in to exploit this window of vulnerability.

Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), who cannot be excluded as a contender to replace Bush in the Oval Office, is positioning himself as a critic of the President's foreign policy. In two statements issued the last week in January, Kennedy condemned the Senate China vote "a victory for President Bush and the Chinese leadership that was responsible for Tiananmen Square," and questioned the legality and political effectiveness of the Panama invasion. "Certainly the United States does not have the right under international law or any other law that I know of to roam the hemisphere, bringing dictators to justice or installing new governments by force on other nations," said Kennedy. "Coupled with the irresponsible sacking of the Nicaraguan ambassador's residence by U.S. forces in Panama City, the outcry against the invasion has significantly boosted the prospects of the Sandinistas in the Nicaraguan elections that will take place next month. President Bush may have captured Noriega, but at the cost of electing [Sandinista President Daniel] Ortega."

Bush's sinking ship

Bush's political weakness runs so deep, that even Republicans have been forced to acknowledge that he may be on the verge of political death. The pro-administration *Washington Times* reported Jan. 22 that a group of political analysts it had gathered together concluded that Bush faces a wide range of problems that "could send his public approval rating plummeting." According to the group, which includes several well-known Republicans, the biggest danger Bush faces is the economy. Bush "doesn't need a full-scale recession to cause tremendous erosion in his political support," said Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress Foundation.

The analysts also stressed that Bush remains "politically weak and unfeared on Capitol Hill"—as the *Washington Times* put it. "George Bush has to fear that the Democrats will all of a sudden stand up and decide they're going to fight him. George is very much of a compromiser, and I'm not sure how he would react if there is aggressive opposition to him," said Lyn Nofziger. "Congress is not afraid of George Bush," said William Schneider of the GOP-linked American Enterprise Institute, pointing to the China issue and the Moynihan proposal as areas where Bush will experience "a lot of trouble."