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# DLC RIP

Posted by JOE KLEIN Wednesday, February 9, 2011 at 12:39 pm

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35

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Ed Kilgore has a solid [obituary](#) for the Democratic Leadership Council, which succumbed to old age this week after a significant 27-year run. But I'd like to add a few words: When I started writing a regular political column for New York Magazine in 1987, the DLC was one of the few organizations around that was thinking creatively about the urban morass that I was writing about. The Democratic Party was, in Bill Clinton's immortal phrase, brain dead when it came to social policy issues in those days. The political correctness was so suffocating that Democrats would face an opprobrium tornado if they supported basic truths like: It is usually better to raise a child with two parents than with one. There is a culture of poverty. Criminals are not depraved because they're deprived; they're just deprived. The U.S. military is a very good thing and the United States is, in most cases, an overpowering force for good in the world. And, in DLC founder Al From's immortal phrase: "The Democrats should be the party of education, not the party of teachers."

From collected some of the best intellectual talent of the moment into the Progressive Policy Institute, especially in the domestic policy area--Bruce Reed, Elaine Kamarck, Bill Galston, Rob Shapiro; that there even *was* a military policy portfolio, maintained by Will Marshall, was unusual for a think tank in a party whose leaders often did not know the difference between a battalion and a brigade. DLC events, as Ed Kilgore writes, were intellectual slugfests with fierce debates on everything from affirmative action to Bill Clinton (whose first two years in office were a severe disappointment to the DLC and whose last six years were a vindication of the organization's tenets). The creative positions that the DLC formulated on welfare policy, crime, education, the earned income tax credit and a raft of other subjects were quickly adopted by the Democratic Party. Those victories helped render the organization less relevant over time.

The DLC also had two severe deficiencies. The first was its relationship to the business community, which was driven--in large part--by the organization's corporate sponsors. Wall Street had too much sway in the DLC; the Wall Street Democrats--people like Bob Rubin, Larry Summers, Steve Rattner, Roger Altman--tilted the policy focus away from productive corporate investment and toward financial speculation fueled by deregulation. This was not merely a policy mistake, it was a moral failure. The DLC's support for free trade--at the expense of fair trade (demanding equal access for our products from our trading partners)--seems downright foolish in retrospect.

And then there was the war in Iraq, which the DLC supported reflexively, as a way of seeming "strong", without ever really analyzing the intellectual weaknesses of the *casus belli*--which, combined with the exposure of the financial community's depredations in 2008, provided a final crushing coda for the DLC. In a way, the difference between the DLC in the 1990s and the 2000s was the difference between Bill Clinton and Joe Lieberman.

Barack Obama's success as a moderate-liberal transcended the old party feuds, for the most part. The Republican party became radically immoderate. The Democratic Party's left seemed a pillar of sanity, by contrast. The DLC had few battles left to fight (ADD: And the Third Way group could fill the DLC's role in a less obnoxious fashion). But I will remember it fondly

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