

Worse than McCain

by Mike Whitney via reed - ICH *Friday, Jul 11 2008, 9:33pm*

international / social/political / other press

Every four years, liberals and progressives are expected to set aside their beliefs and stand foursquare behind the Democratic Party candidate. This ritual is invariably performed in the name of party unity. It doesn't matter if the candidate is a smooth-talking politician who's willing to toss his Pastor of 20 years overboard for a few awkward comments, or whether he refuses to defend basic civil liberties like the 4th amendment's right to privacy. All that matters is that there's a big "D" following his name and that he shows he's willing to engage in some meaningless verbal jousting with his Republican opponent.



For nearly a year now, the public has been treated to regular doses of Mr. Obama's grandiloquent oratory and his sweeping "Follow me to Shangri-la" promises. These flourishes are usually followed by "clarifications" on the central issues which identify Obama as a center-right conservative with no intention of disrupting the status quo. Political analyst Alexander Cockburn summed it up like this in a recent article on counterpunch:

"There have plenty of articles recently with headlines such "Obama's Lunge to the Right". I find these odd. Never for one moment has Obama ever struck me as someone anchored, or even loosely moored to the left, or even displaying the slightest appetite for radical notions, aside from a few taglines tossed from the campaign bus." (Alexander Cockburn, "Could Anyone be Worse than Bush?")

Cockburn is right and most people know it. They simply ignore the facts because the thought of the unstable John McCain in the Oval Office with his stubby fingers just inches from the Big Red Switch is too much to bear. So, they throw their support behind Obama and hope for the best. But Obama has done nothing to earn their vote and there's nothing to indicate that he has any interest in restoring the republic or putting an end to US adventurism. He's just a one-term senator with zero

foreign policy experience who doesn't want to rock the boat. That's it. He'd rather keep his position on the issues blurry and rattle off lofty-sounding platitudes than state plainly how he feels. Unfortunately, when he's pinned down and has to give a straight answer, he quickly swerves to the right where he feels most at home.

This concerns the Obamaniacs who worry that behind the rhetorical fanfare, Barak is just an empty gourd; a well-spoken pitch man with no moral core. Could he be another Slick Willie, they wonder; another self-promoting politico as eager to sell out his working class supporters as chase a frisky intern around the Lincoln bedroom? No one knows, because no one has figured out exactly why Obama is running. Does he really want to lift the country from the muck of 8 years of Bush misrule or does he just want to gad about on Airforce 1 and make pretty speeches in the Rose Garden? What really drives Obama? It's a mystery.

But don't be fooled, Obama could turn out to be worse than McCain, much worse. No one doubts that he is brighter and more charismatic than the irritating senator from Arizona. And no one underestimates his Pied Piper ability to galvanize crowds and stir up national pride. But what good is that? Obama works for the same group of venal plutocrats as Bush; a fact that was made painfully clear just last week when he voted to approve the new FISA bill that allows the president to continue spying on American citizens with impunity. Obama is a constitutional scholar; he understood what he was voting for. He was sending a message to his supporters that they don't really matter; that what really counts is the small gaggle of powerful corporatists who run the country and believe the president is above the law. That's what his vote really meant.

So, why vote for him? We don't need a glamor boy to trash the Bill of Rights. Any old autocrat will do. Just pick a name from the "resident scholar" list at the American Enterprise Institute. That ought to do it.

And we don't need another paper-mache president who tries to conceal America's war crimes behind stuffy-sounding pronouncements about the "Islamofacism" and other terrorist mumbo-jumbo. What we need is someone with enough guts and moral fiber to shake up the political establishment, put an end to the wars and covert operations, and clean up Wall Street.

Obama has dazzled the media with his easy manner and his savoir faire, but he's not the right man for the job. He has surrounded himself with ex-Clintonistas who will continue the global onslaught with even greater ferocity than Bush, although much more discreetly. (After all, this is the empire's A Team) And just like Clinton, who bombed the bejesus out of Belgrade for 87 days without batting an eye; Obama will keep the war machine chugging along at full-throttle while he diverts the media with his colorful bloviating and his rock star persona. No thanks.

What the world really needs is a five or ten year break from the United States; a little breather so people can unwind and take it easy for a while without worrying that their wedding party will be vaporized in blast of napalm or that their brother-in-law will be dragged off to some CIA hellhole where his eyes are gouged out and his fingernails ripped off. That's what the world really needs, a temporary pause in the imperial violence. But there won't be any sabbatical under Field-Marshal Obama; no way. As journalist Bill Van Auken points out in his article on the World Socialist web site, Obama may turn out to be the point-man for reinstating the draft:

Obama has "lamented the failure of the Bush administration to issue "a call to service" and "a call for shared sacrifice....There is no challenge greater than the defense of our nation and our values," said Obama. We "need to ease the burden on our troops, while meeting the challenges of the 21st century," which, according to Obama, will require an "increase US ground forces by 65,000 soldiers

and 27,000 Marines.'" ("Obama continues lurch to the right on Iraq war and militarism" Bill Van Auken)

Is that why the political establishment is so enthusiastic about Obama, because they need a better recruiting sergeant than the uninspiring McCain?

No one has followed Obama's rightward drift with greater interest and bemusement than the editors of the Wall Street Journal. They have faithfully chronicled all the vacillating, obfuscating and backpedaling and they've made up their minds; Obama is marching straight towards the welcoming arms of the Republican Party. That's right; he's gradually embracing the conservative platform and abandoning any pretense of liberalism. Two weeks ago the WSJ ran an editorial that summarized Obama's metamorphosis in an article titled "Bush's Third Term":

"We're beginning to understand why Barack Obama keeps protesting so vigorously against the prospect of 'George Bush's third term.' Maybe he's worried that someone will notice that he's the candidate who's running for it.

Most Presidential candidates adapt their message after they win their party nomination, but Mr. Obama isn't merely 'running to the center.' He's fleeing from many of his primary positions so markedly and so rapidly that he's embracing a sizable chunk of President Bush's policy. Who would have thought that a Democrat would rehabilitate the much-maligned Bush agenda?" (Wall Street Journal)

That's fair enough. Obama has changed his position on his "support a filibuster of any bill that includes retroactive immunity for telecommunications companies". He has wormed his way out of a definite commitment on withdrawing the troops from Iraq. (which was a real lesson in Clintonian triangulation) He's backed off on his promise to rewrite the NAFTA free trade agreement. He's thrown his support behind Bush's "faith-based" social programs which provide state money for religious organizations. He's even sided with the far-right loonies on the Supreme Court on gun rights and whether to ban the death penalty for rape. (truly outrageous) How can anyone support a candidate who is on the same ideological side of legal issues as Antonin Scalia?

In the past few weeks, Senator Switcheroo has blasted Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad while, at the same time, heaping praise on our "good friend" Israel. Obama even has a two paragraph commentary on his campaign web site lauding Israel's devastating attack on Lebanon a year ago which killed 1,500 civilians and reduced much of the country's vital infrastructure to rubble.

Still think the "peace candidate" does not have the warmongering bone fides to do the empire's dirty work?

Think again.

Many of us who have criticized Obama are being dismissed as cynics, but that's nonsense. The truth is that the Obama supporters have projected their own values onto their candidate and are trying to make him out to be something that he is not. They put words in his mouth so they can continue to hold on to the crazy notion that the system really isn't broken and that it can be fixed by simply pulling a lever on election day. This is just the lazy-man's way of ignoring the real work that needs to be done to restore American democracy; the organizing of groups and networks, the building of labor unions and working coalitions, the focussed determination to root-out corruption and entrenched corporate power. The system has to be rebuilt from the bottom-up not the top-down. It'll

take a revolution in thinking and lots of hard work. There's no quick fix. Freedom isn't free anymore; deal with it. Voting for Obama and keeping one's fingers crossed, is not a sign of hope. It's a sign of self-delusion.

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