

Rise of the "unwashed" Blogosphere

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Murdoch's Minions Smear Bloggers

Not so long ago, the Republican right expected to dominate American politics for generations to come. Karl Rove, "boy genius" of the GOP, believed that his generation had achieved a partisan realignment that would overturn the progressive achievements of the past century.

Now those confident predictions have crashed with the failure of George W. Bush and the rise of a new progressive politics powered by the Internet. What traditional pundits once dismissed as the unwashed peasantry of the blogosphere has risen up to donate millions of dollars, elect Democratic candidates and demand real change. Having inflicted a terrible defeat on the Republicans last year, the "netroots" progressives are preparing to achieve historic victories in 2008.

Naturally, the would-be bullies of the right have not taken this development very well. As reactionaries tend to do, they have reacted with anger and attempted intimidation.

Rupert Murdoch's Fox News Channel has mounted a crusade against DailyKos.com, the largest progressive political website, and YearlyKos, the site's annual blogger convention, which will take place in Chicago next month. On his nightly broadcast, Fox News sage Bill O'Reilly charged that the proprietors of Daily Kos are "hatemongers" like the Ku Klux Klan or the Nazis—and targeted JetBlue for serving as the official airline of YearlyKos. O'Reilly's ranting and raving frightened the JetBlue suits into withdrawing their sponsorship.

Then came Weekly Standard Editor William Kristol, another Murdoch minion, who tried to frighten the Democrats away from Daily Kos. "Every Democratic presidential nominee is going to the Daily Kos convention," he sniffed. "That's the left-wing blogger who was not respectable three or four years ago. ... Now the whole party is going to pay court to him and to left-wing blogs." Clearly he meant to warn that the Democrats would suffer from their association with those disreputable leftists—and that the netroots are a fringe, extremist element.

The most obvious answer is to urge them both to look in the mirror. To listen to O'Reilly—who has publicly urged the destruction of San Francisco and Iran, in addition to making thousands of other equally charming remarks—is to hear corrosive hatred distilled into a nightly dose of poison. The occasional outburst on a liberal blog, almost always in the anonymous comments section, cannot compare with the daily outpouring of vitriol on Fox.

As for Kristol, he is in no position to accuse anyone else of extremism. His chief allies have long been among the theocratic evangelical rightists. For years he has provided the worst possible advice to the Republicans, habitually promoting divisive and violent policies. During the Clinton administration, he led the drive for impeachment, urging the congressional majority to ignore public disapproval. This stupidity led to a Republican rout in the 1998 midterm election.

Having failed to learn that lesson, the Republicans listened to Kristol's intense advocacy of invading Iraq, back when he assured everyone that war would be easy and fun and that any talk of Shiite-

Sunni conflict was mere “pop sociology.” Liberals can only hope that crackpots like him maintain their influence over the Republicans for a few more years, reducing the right-wing party to a permanent minority.

But are the bloggers somewhere on the opposite extreme? For those who have yet to make his acquaintance, the creator of Daily Kos is Markos Moulitsas—a U.S. Army veteran of Salvadoran and Greek extraction who grew up in the Midwest and now lives in the Bay Area with his wife and two children. He is a business entrepreneur and a serious sports fan. He also happens to be a liberal Democrat with a determination to win and occasionally a hot temper.

He and the other leading voices in the netroots seek a Democratic politics that is both pragmatic and principled. Antiwar, but certainly not anti-military, they have fostered alliances with veterans of Iraq. They avoid rigidity, dislike identity politics and apply few litmus tests. In 2006 the bloggers raised money for many of the Democrats deemed “conservative” by the Washington press corps.

In truth, the bloggers share the values of most Americans, who also want to end the war in Iraq, establish universal health insurance, reduce global warming, increase the minimum wage and preserve Social Security. It is the ideologues such as O'Reilly and Kristol whose opposition to those values locates them on the fringe, despite their loud megaphones and corporate backing. And what the Murdoch bullies prove whenever they try to stigmatize the citizen bloggers is just how much they fear a fair (and balanced) fight.

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