

McCain-Palin campaign's attacks on Obama: a whiff of fascism

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Faced with dwindling poll numbers and an increasingly hostile political environment created by the economy's dizzying downward spiral, the Republican campaign of John McCain and Sarah Palin has responded with a virulently right-wing appeal directed to the most politically backward layers in America.

Campaign rallies for the Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates have taken on an increasingly angry and even violent tone.

Virulent denunciations of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama delivered by Palin at campaign rallies in Florida this week were met with shouts from the crowd of "treason" and, in one case, "kill him."

At an event in New Mexico, McCain delivered a stock rhetorical line aimed at invoking fears of the Democratic candidate: "Who is Barack Obama?" Without missing a beat, a shout came back from the audience: "terrorist."

The *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank reported from a campaign rally in Clearwater, Florida in which the crowd, inspired by Palin's attacks on the media, turned on reporters shouting abuse and waving sticks. "Others hurled obscenities at a camera crew," Milbank recounted. "One supporter shouted a racial epithet at an African-American sound man ... and told him, 'Sit down boy.'"

Last February, McCain felt compelled to disassociate himself from a right-wing talk radio announcer who, in introducing the Republican candidate, referred to his Democratic rival as "Barack Hussein Obama," with the accent on the middle name. Now the reference has become routine at Republican rallies, feeding into a general theme of the campaign that the Democratic senator from Illinois not only cannot be trusted, but is a potential terrorist, and making a barely concealed appeal to racism.

"Think how you'll feel on November 5 if you wake up in the morning and see the news that Barack Obama--that Barack Hussein Obama--is the president-elect of the United States," Lehigh County Republican Party chairman Bill Platt declared in a warm-up speech for Sarah Palin in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The remark was met with loud boos.

The atmosphere in these Republican events resembles more and more that of a lynch mob. And the continuous attempts to

paint Obama as a "traitor" and "terrorist" have the potential of inciting real violence, including attempts on the Democratic candidate's life.

At the center of this extreme right-wing turn in the Republican campaign strategy is a McCarthyite smear campaign linking Obama to William Ayers, a former member of the 1960s-era Weather Underground group, who today holds the title of "distinguished professor" of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago and is a liberal reformist.

The McCain campaign unveiled a 90-second Internet campaign ad that rehashes the fact that Ayers hosted an event in his home when Obama was running for state senator in 1995 and that the two subsequently served together on the board of a non-profit organization.

Cutting back and forth between photos of Obama and Ayers, it concludes with the narrator's ominous sounding voice-over: "Obama's friendship with terrorist Ayers isn't the issue. The issue is Barack Obama's judgment and candor. When Obama just says, 'This is a guy who lives in the neighborhood,' Americans says, 'Where's the truth, Barack?' Barack Obama, too risky for America."

McCain echoed the same witch-hunting theme virtually verbatim at a campaign event in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Thursday: "Look, we don't care about an old washed-up terrorist and his wife, who still, at least on Sept. 11, 2001, said he still wanted to bomb more. That's not the point here. The point is Senator Obama said he was just a guy in the neighborhood. We know that's just not true. We need to know the full extent of the relationship because of whether Senator Obama is telling the truth to the American people or not. That's the question."

This thoroughly reactionary campaign, based on half-truths and innuendo, has been dutifully echoed by the mass media, with the *New York Times* publishing a front-page article on the Obama-Ayers connection last week, MSNBC running an investigative report on the subject and Rupert Murdoch's Fox News making it the overriding political story each and every day.

Ayers--referred to by the McCain campaign as "terrorist Ayers," as if it were some military title--is, it deserves pointing out, a private citizen with no connection to Obama's

presidential campaign. He was never convicted of any crime nor charged with anyone's death.

Yet, the clear aim of the Republican campaign is to link him--and by association, Obama--to the terrorist attacks of September 11, thereby painting the Democratic candidate as a traitor and unfit for office.

The Weather Underground, the group in which Ayers was a leading figure, emerged out of the mass opposition to the Vietnam War that saw millions of Americans take to the streets to demand an end to US military slaughter.

The group expressed the frustration and disorientation of a section of the protesters who, despairing of the possibility of winning the American working class to the struggle against war and capitalism and influenced by the retrograde theories of Maoism, turned to what they saw as a more radical form of protest, involving isolated bombings.

During a period in which the US war machine was responsible for killing over 3 million Vietnamese, the Weather Underground's activities cost a total of three lives, all of them members of the group itself, who were killed in an accidental explosion.

Part of the McCain campaign's focus on this issue is aimed at demonizing the mass opposition that helped to force an end to the Vietnam War and rehabilitating the war itself. Only in this context can one understand the incongruous accusation by McCain--the former fighter pilot shot down while bombing heavily populated areas of Hanoi--that Obama is guilty of associating with someone involved in the "bombing of innocent civilians."

The inability of the Obama campaign to mount a direct and forceful response to this diatribe is bound up with its essential acceptance of this version of the Vietnam War, expressed in the Democratic candidate's continuous "honoring" of McCain's military service. The Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are determined to put behind them the so-called "Vietnam syndrome," a euphemism for the enduring hostility of the American people to sacrificing the lives of its youth in wars of aggression.

While essentially cowing in the face of the Republican smear campaign over Ayers, the Democrats have done nothing to expose the real dangers represented by the political forces to which their Republican rivals are now making such a direct appeal.

The nature of these political layers emerges clearly in the associations of their vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin, who was picked for her ability to "energize the base," i.e., whip up the Republican right.

Her husband was a member, and she at least a political sympathizer, of the Alaska Independence Party (AIP), an outfit that called for the secession of Alaska from the union and formed the Alaskan chapter of the Constitution Party, an extreme right-wing organization advocating Christian theocratic rule in America. Its founder, Joe Vogler, was killed

in 1993 in what was described by the media as a "plastic-explosives sale gone bad."

The politics of the AIP paralleled that of the right-wing militia movement that gave rise to such elements as Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the authors of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that claimed the lives of 168 people.

Moreover, Palin's central appeal is based on her hard-line anti-abortion position, embraced by the Christian right and an anti-abortion movement that has given rise to the largest share of terrorist attacks carried out on American soil over the past two decades, including murders of health care practitioners, bombings, arsons, assaults and threats of violence.

Yet neither the Democratic Party nor the media has shown an inclination to cast any light on these relations, much less subject them to the kind of front-page treatment given to the four-decades-old exploits of William Ayers and his tenuous connections to Obama.

The role of the Christian right and of semi-fascistic elements within the Republican Party remains the great unmentionable in American politics. They are accorded political protection and legitimacy precisely for the role they play in diverting the anger and frustration of sections of the population into reactionary channels that serve to prop up the ruling establishment.

The right-wing campaign presently being waged by the Republican Party has ominous implications. While it is highly questionable whether it will shift votes from Obama to McCain, it is serving to mobilize the most reactionary political forces and whip them to a fever pitch.

These forces will not go away after the November election. Given an Obama victory at the polls, they will be utilized to place continuous pressure on the incoming administration, driving it ever further towards the right.

Moreover, under conditions in which the immense crisis of American capitalism will inevitably produce explosive mass social struggles, the political sentiments to which the Republicans are appealing today will tomorrow form the ideological basis for fascistic movements aimed against the working class.

The Democrats' inability and unwillingness to answer the attacks coming from the McCain-Palin campaign demonstrates the impossibility of countering this threat from the right by voting for Obama. It requires, above all, the political mobilization of the working class through the building of an independent party fighting for its own interests on the basis of a socialist program. This is the alternative fought for solely by the Socialist Equality Party.



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