The New York Times' endorsement of Obama

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A series of major newspapers have announced their endorsement of Democrat Barack Obama for president, including the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Los Angeles Times*. This lineup behind Obama culminated in Friday's endorsement by the *New York Times*, the leading US newspaper and the principal voice of the liberal wing of the American political establishment.

The generally favorable media attitude toward Obama reflects the fact that decisive sections of the American ruling elite have swung behind his candidacy. This is not because they share popular illusions in Obama, but because they regard these illusions as a valuable political asset in a period of deep crisis for American capitalism. They have come to believe, accepting the candidate's own assurances, that Obama will be a thoroughly reliable and conservative defender of the interests of the financial aristocracy, both at home and abroad.

These calculations are reflected in the *Times*' page-length editorial explaining its endorsement. According to the *Times*, "Mr. Obama has met challenge after challenge, growing as a leader and putting real flesh on his early promises of hope and change."

In its summary of Obama's positions on domestic issues, the *Times* highlights a passage in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, when he declared, "Government cannot solve all our problems, but what it should do is that which we cannot do for ourselves: protect us from harm and provide every child a decent education; keep our water clean and our toys safe; invest in new schools and new roads and new science and technology."

This modest list of government functions would not have been out of place at a Republican convention in the Reagan years. In selecting this quote, the *Times* is reassuring the corporate establishment that an Obama administration will not be swayed by popular demands for significant social measures to address growing unemployment, homelessness and poverty.

The newspaper praises Obama for his calls for "shared sacrifice and social responsibility"—code words for austerity measures and social spending cuts. It goes on to suggest that Obama can be counted on not to use his power to nominate Supreme Court and federal judges to tilt the judicial system in a manner inimical to the basic interests of big business, noting that "Obama may appoint less liberal judges than some of his followers might like..."

In its discussion of foreign policy, the *Times* begins with the "overstretched" condition of the American military, and contrasts the "necessary war in Afghanistan" with the "unnecessary and staggeringly costly war in Iraq." The editorial praises Obama for insisting that US troop levels in Iraq must be reduced in order to substantially increase them in Afghanistan.

As documented in a lengthy article in the *Times* itself, published only the day before, it is difficult to discern which of the two candidates, Republican John McCain or Obama, can be properly characterized as more aggressive and militarist in foreign policy. McCain is a diehard for "victory" in Iraq, and more openly belligerent toward Russia, but Obama has taken the more aggressive line on Afghanistan, Pakistan and, in recent weeks, Iran. He is also inclined to support greater use of US military force in the guise of humanitarian intervention in such regions as Darfur.

His vice presidential running mate, Senator Joseph Biden, praised by the *Times* for his "deep foreign policy expertise," was an early backer of the war in Iraq and has long been among the most fervent proponents of US military action among leading Senate Democrats.

Obama's backers within the US foreign policy

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establishment have argued from the outset that he can provide American imperialism with a new and improved image abroad, after eight years of a Republican administration that has provoked popular revulsion around the world. The *Times* declares, "Both candidates talk about repairing America's image in the world. But it seems clear to us that Mr. Obama is far more likely to do that — and not just because the first black president would present a new American face to the world."

The *Times* goes on to criticize the Bush administration's "relentless attack" on the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and democratic rights in general, citing such actions as the establishment of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp and secret CIA torture chambers, massive spying on Americans, and the enactment of "hundreds, if not thousands of secret orders."

The newspaper then credits Obama with "promising to identify and correct Mr. Bush's attacks on the democratic system." Here the newspaper seems to be indulging in pure fantasy. Throughout the general election campaign, Obama has made a point of not raising in any significant way the police state measures that have been enacted by the Bush administration.

On the contrary, the Democrats in Congress, Obama among them, have been the enablers of the Bush administration's war on democratic rights. Most recently, Obama left the campaign trail to cast his vote in the Senate for legislation that retroactively legalized the program of covert surveillance on phone calls and e-mails and immunized the giant telecommunications firms that collaborated with the CIA, NSA and Pentagon in violating the privacy of their customers.

On the economic crisis, the editorial attributes the turmoil in world financial markets solely to "decades of Republican deregulatory and anti-tax policies." That these policies were enacted under Democratic as well as Republican administrations is passed over in silence.

The *Times* is well aware that this crisis poses the danger to the ruling elite of a growth of class struggle in the United States. Obama, it suggests, is better equipped than his Republican opponent to mitigate this threat. The editorial, for example, boosts Obama as someone who can forge a "broad political consensus," while it denounces McCain for conducting a campaign "on partisan division, class warfare and even hints of racism."

The "newspaper of record" is no less aware that under conditions of global recession and financial turmoil, US imperialism will rely even more than previously on military actions to offset the decline in its global economic position. As the editorial makes clear, the *Times* is backing Obama because it believes he can more intelligently and competently defend US imperialist interests and oversee American military interventions in the Middle East, Central Asia and elsewhere.

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