

The dismissal of Van Jones

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Van Jones, the Obama administration's "environmental jobs czar," submitted his resignation on Saturday after coming under attack from the extreme right for past positions, including signing a statement questioning the official explanation for the September 11 attacks.

While the dismissal of Jones came in the form of a resignation letter, it is clear that the Obama administration had decided to drop him. The move was announced at around midnight on Saturday night of a long weekend, in the hope that the news story would be quickly buried.

When asked about the resignation on Sunday, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs indicated the administration's support for the aide's removal, saying that Jones resigned because "the agenda of the president is bigger than any one individual."

Jones occupied a fairly minor position in the administration as the Special Advisor for Green Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. However, his previous positions and associations became the focus of a several-weeks-long campaign by Fox News commentator Glenn Beck and other semi-fascistic media and Internet personalities, who demanded Jones's scalp.

What was Jones's crime? He once, before accommodating himself to the political establishment, demonstrated a certain degree of social commitment. In the early 1990s, while a law student at Yale University, he was involved in protests over the beating of Rodney King by police. He was later briefly associated with a Maoist organization known as STORM, which organized anti-war and anti-police brutality campaigns.

Like many of this social layer, Jones quickly modified his positions as he advanced his career. He became involved with various liberal identity politics organizations, before becoming an adherent of "green capitalism," pushing the idea that urban centers could be revived by providing job training in the "new energy economy." He wrote a best-selling book in 2008, *The Green Collar Economy*.

One of Jones's main sins in the eyes of his critics was

signing a "911 Truth Statement" in 2004. The statement pointed to the many still unanswered questions surrounding the attacks of September 11, and called for an investigation, Congressional hearings, media attention, and an independent inquiry.

There is nothing particularly extraordinary about the statement signed by Jones, which begins by citing a Zogby International poll finding that about half of New York City residents, and 41 percent of residents in New York state, believe that sections of the US government had foreknowledge of the attacks and "consciously failed" to act. Sixty-six percent supported a new investigation into these questions. Other polls have found that more than a third of the population and more than 40 percent of self-described Democrats throughout the country reject the official explanation of September 11.

Calling into question the foundation of the "war on terror," however, is completely proscribed within the political establishment and mass media. Indeed, the broad-based skepticism over 9/11, the event that became the central rationale for the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the massive attack on democratic rights in the US, is remarkable given the complete silence on such matters within "official" circles.

Jones's association with such conceptions is particularly problematic for the Obama administration as it carries out a massive escalation of the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, on the pretext that this is necessary to go after the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks.

Jones himself moved quickly to repudiate any association with the 9/11 statement once his signing of it came to light. "I do not agree with this statement and it certainly does not reflect my views now or ever," he declared.

Aside from this, Jones was videotaped referring in 2008 to some Republicans as "assholes." He suggested that some Democrats should take on a similar disposition in response.

Glenn Beck, whose show was being targeted for an advertising boycott by an organization formerly run by

Jones, cited the White House aide's history as part of an increasingly hysterical campaign, insisting that Obama is secretly plotting to introduce communism in America.

This past Friday, Beck's denunciations were taken up by Republican Senator Kit Bond, who called for a Senate hearing to determine whether Jones was fit for his post (as a low-level White House employee, he did not require Senate confirmation). Republican Representative Mike Pence demanded his resignation because "his extremist views and coarse rhetoric have no place in this administration or the public debate."

To avoid any discussion on Jones, the Obama administration quickly caved in, essentially giving a veto to the extreme right-wing—which in fact has very little support within the population—over who can and cannot hold government posts.

There is a broader significance to this event. Obama came to office on a wave of anger and opposition to the policies of the Bush administration. However, this opposition has found no expression in the Obama administration, which on every issue—war, democratic rights, bank bailouts and domestic policy—has continued and expanded the policy of its predecessor.

At the same time, Obama is under constant pressure from the extreme right. The administration's invariable response is to do all it can to appease this layer and move further to the right. Thus, once he came under fire, Jones was quickly disposed of.

The Jones affair, and the Obama administration as a whole, reeks of cowardice and reaction. As for Jones's claim that he resigned (in fact, he was fired) so as not to get in the way of Obama's "agenda," his dismissal is entirely consistent with that agenda.

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