

Right-wing march in Washington against Obama health care plan

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On Saturday, right-wing groups organized a demonstration in Washington to denounce the Obama administration, with particular focus on the proposed health care overhaul outlined in the president's speech before Congress on Wednesday.

The march, organized by former Republican House Majority Leader Dick Armey's group, FreedomWorks, attracted an extremely confused social layer, combining demands for lower taxes and less government spending with fanatical anti-abortion and anti-immigrant politics. Reflecting views promoted by fascistic talk show commentators, many denounced Obama for attempting to introduce "socialism" in America, while others likened him to Hitler and questioned his status as a US citizen.

The immediate political motive of the organizers was to denounce what they called "ObamaCare," which the FreedomWorks web site characterizes as a "government takeover of health care." They have focused particular attention on the so-called "public option," a proposal that would establish a very limited government-run insurance plan to compete with private insurers in a revamped health care market.

In his speech Wednesday, Obama made clear that he was prepared to drop the "public option" in order to appease the insurance industry, Republican critics of his health care plan, and "moderate" Democrats who have balked at even this token role for the government in the health care market.

Aside from Armey, the rally was addressed by Republican Congressman Michael Pence of Indiana and Republican Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina, among others.

Attendance was not very large. According to media reports, those marching numbered between 15,000 and 30,000. The protest was far smaller than the massive

anti-war demonstrations that preceded the invasion of Iraq in February of 2003, but this weekend's demonstration has been given vastly disproportionate coverage in the US media, particularly on cable television. It hardly represents a mass popular uprising, as claimed by the organizers and media promoters.

Nevertheless, the mobilization does raise the danger of the growth of extreme right-wing forces. This danger does not stem from the existence today of a mass base for right-wing and fascistic politics in the United States. In fact, the majority of the population supports universal health care, increased taxes on the rich, and other egalitarian social policies.

Rather, the danger arises fundamentally from the subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party and the Obama administration, and thereby to the US ruling class. The political disenfranchisement of the working class is maintained through the political monopoly exercised by two right-wing parties of big business.

Whatever the denunciations of a "government takeover of health care," Obama's plan represents an attempt to scale back government spending and lower corporate health care expenses.

As Obama declared in his speech on Wednesday, "Our health care problem is our deficit problem." His speech has shifted discussion within the political establishment even more directly to finding new ways to cut costs. His proposal, requiring individuals to purchase bare-bones coverage from private insurers, has as its ultimate aim the phasing out of employer-provided health care—saving corporations billions—and substantially reducing the costs of Medicare and Medicaid.

There is entirely legitimate anxiety among broad sections of the population over the future of health care.

Senior citizens and others are justly worried that the cost-cutting will lead to cuts in services, and Obama's overhaul as a whole will lead to a vast expansion in the power of the insurance industry over the US health care system.

However, this popular opposition finds no expression within any section of the political establishment or either of the two parties. The subordination of the working class to Obama and the Democrats blocks the development of a progressive alternative. The Republican right seeks to make gains by exploiting the political vacuum—as far as the broad masses can see—on the left.

Here the role of the pseudo-progressive and liberal middle-class organizations is critical. By backing Obama and covering up for his right-wing policies, they work to prevent any organized expression of the interests and concerns of the masses of working people. This is true in relation to domestic policies—the health care anti-reform, the assault on auto workers, the bailout of Wall Street, the continuation of Bush's police state measures—as well as foreign policy.

These groups oppose any genuine struggle against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Some of them are only now planning to stage “anti-war” demonstrations in order to disorient and derail growing anti-war sentiment. For the most part, they offer prescriptions for a more effective imperialist strategy in Central Asia.

These organizations and their mouthpieces—such as the *Nation* magazine—are obsessed with identity and lifestyle issues, which reflect the concerns of the more privileged and complacent social layers they represent. They are indifferent to the social concerns—jobs, wages, living standards, home foreclosures, etc.—that drive the broad masses of the people, who are being devastated by the crisis and the policies of the Obama administration.

A recent article published in the *Nation* (“A Method to Their Madness”) discusses the politics of the right-wing forces and declares that they gain strength when there is an “absence of leadership.” In a revealing exposure, the article notes that “less than a third of the country believes Obama has clearly explained his plans for health care reform... According to a CNN poll, only one in five believes he or she will be better off after health care reform has passed, and 40 percent say they are confused by the proposals.”

The article goes on to urge Obama to provide this “leadership” by making a case for the “public option.” It once again promotes the lie that the purpose of the health care overhaul is to provide “universal healthcare.”

In reality, the confusion and concern over the health care overhaul is a response to the duplicity of the Obama administration, which attempts to cloak a health care counter-revolution in the guise of social reform. Outfits like the *Nation* work consciously to perpetuate this fraud. In the coming elections, they will no doubt once again point to the prospect of Republican gains as an argument for supporting the Democratic Party.

Oblivious to the historical and political implications of the current crisis, they are incapable of understanding the logic of their own policies. At some point, a section of the far-right elements that staged the demonstration on Saturday will begin to make a populist appeal to broader social concerns. This will raise the specter of a genuine fascist movement.

The critical question for workers and youth is to grasp the reactionary nature of the politics of these middle-class groups, reject their false perspective, and take up the fight for a break with the Democrats and the development of a struggle against the Obama administration based on the political independence of the working class and a socialist and internationalist program. As workers enter into struggle against mass unemployment, poverty and war, there will be growing popular support for such a perspective.

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