

# White House condemns criticism from the left

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13 August 2010

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs denounced liberal critics of the Obama administration, in comments to *The Hill*, a daily publication covering Congress. He focused particularly on claims that Obama's policies continued those of his Republican predecessor. "I hear these people saying he's like George Bush. Those people ought to be drug tested," Gibbs said. "I mean, it's crazy."

The press secretary dismissed what he called the "professional left" in terms that echoed Fox News. "They will be satisfied when we have Canadian healthcare and we've eliminated the Pentagon," Gibbs said. "That's not reality. They wouldn't be satisfied if Dennis Kucinich was president."

The supposed targets of Gibbs' ire, media pundits like Keith Olberman and Rachel Maddow, and a handful of liberal Democrats in Congress, responded characteristically—that is, with a mixture of hand-wringing and cringing. Olberman and Maddow, who host television interview programs on MSNBC, complained about the tone of Gibbs' remarks.

Congressman Kucinich responded with a declaration of absolute fealty to the Obama administration. "I think that Mr. Gibbs and the White House need to realize that liberals support the president," he said, "but the criticism is really a measure of hopes that have not been realized and the intention to make sure they get realized while we have a president that we do want to support."

He went on to argue: "To try to paint as out of the mainstream people who want a full employment economy, people who want peace, people who want to get out of Iraq and Afghanistan, that is the mistake that Mr. Gibbs made."

Just to make sure that no one mistook such comments for actual opposition, Kucinich declared that he would not, as in 2004 and 2008, mount a presidential campaign in 2012, challenging Obama in the Democratic primaries. Rather than oppose the White House, he told ABC News, "What we have to do is focus on coming together for the purposes of getting out of Iraq and Afghanistan."

Kucinich did not explain how it was possible to "come together" for withdrawal from Afghanistan with an administration that is doing the exact opposite. While Kucinich claims to favor "getting out" of Afghanistan, the president he supports has tripled the number of US troops in that country, with a consequent rapid increase in both US/NATO casualties and deaths of innocent Afghan civilians.

Gibbs' remarks were not an off-the-cuff outburst. As politico.com noted, these statements "came not in the heat of his daily briefing but in the cool of his West Wing office. In other words, Gibbs knew what he was doing. And so did Obama."

With its vitriolic language, suggesting that to compare Obama to Bush and the Republicans is the product of mental illness or drug abuse, the Gibbs diatribe was a deliberate attempt to declare any criticism of Obama from the left illegitimate. The Obama administration would like to create the illusion that its only real opposition comes from the Republican Party and the ultra-right "Tea Party" elements.

It is noteworthy that no Obama official has used language like that employed by Gibbs against the right-wing critics of the administration, even the racist fringe, or the genuinely delusional elements who question Obama's citizenship or portray him as born in Kenya, a socialist or secret Muslim.

The real target of the White House, however, is not the impotent liberalism of Olberman and Kucinich. It is the growing opposition to the Obama administration's policies from below, from the broad masses of working people and youth who increasingly recognize that the vague promises of "hope" and "change" in which Obama wrapped his 2008 presidential campaign were a fraud.

Popular opposition to the Obama administration from the working class is driven by two central political developments: the ongoing economic slump, and the war in Afghanistan.

Millions of working people realize that the administration's economic program has bailed out the

banks and restored corporate profitability, but done nothing for the poor, the unemployed, workers who face wage freezes or outright cuts, or small businesses on the brink of bankruptcy. Administration officials arouse outrage every time they proclaim the strengthening economic “recovery,” when working people can look around them and see deepening depression.

In his foreign policy, Obama has chosen to escalate the war in Afghanistan, tripling the number of troops there to more than 100,000. But the most recent polls show a staggering 70 percent of the American people believe the war will turn out badly, with most of those favoring the withdrawal of US troops.

There is a distinct socio-economic divide in the sinking poll numbers for Obama. According to an analysis of Gallup polling numbers published Tuesday, support for the Obama administration is collapsing among working people while it remains essentially unchanged among the upper middle class and the financial aristocracy.

Between March 2009 and July 2010, Obama’s approval rating has fallen 24 percentage points among those with a household income of less than \$50,000 a year. His approval rating has fallen 13 percentage points among those in the \$50,000-\$100,000 a year bracket, and 17 percentage points among those with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000 a year. But among those with incomes above \$150,000 a year, the decline is minimal: a drop of only four percent.

These figures are symptomatic of the deepening class polarization in the United States, which must lead, sooner rather than later, to the emergence of a movement from below, which will come into direct conflict with the Obama administration, the entire US political establishment and the capitalist system that they defend.



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