

Obama's 2010 campaign: Fake populism and right-wing policies

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President Barack Obama began his longest campaign swing of the 2010 elections Wednesday, a four-day tour of the West Coast and Nevada to urge a vote for beleaguered Democratic Party candidates. At each stop, he warned that the outcome of the November 2 congressional election would set the direction of the country “for the next 20 years,” making dire predictions of the right-wing policies that a Republican-controlled Congress would carry out.

While his pseudo-populist rhetoric against Wall Street won applause at large rallies in Oregon and Washington, packed with college students, there is little practical difference between the policies the Obama administration is already implementing and the measures the Republicans would carry out if they return to power.

Obama suggested that the Republicans would “cut taxes for millionaires and billionaires,” “cut rules for special interests, including polluters” and “cut middle-class families loose to fend for themselves.” These charges would be a fair summary of the domestic policies of his own administration.

Continuing the bailout of Wall Street that was begun under Bush, the Obama administration has carried the largest handout of public funds to the wealthy in American history. This was followed up by the enactment last summer of a financial system “reform” bill so toothless that it punishes no one for the greatest outbreak of swindling in history.

The White House assiduously protected oil giant BP from the repercussions of the greatest environmental disaster in US history and last week lifted its moratorium on deepwater drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

As for leaving ordinary families “to fend for themselves,” the Obama administration has imposed the burden of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression on working class families, rejecting any serious action as mass unemployment, mass poverty and mass foreclosures have become permanent features of American life.

In the month leading up to the November 2 election, Obama has alternated speeches bashing the Republicans as tools of Wall Street with actions that demonstrate that the Democrats are no less committed to the defense of the

financial aristocracy.

On the same day Obama boarded Air Force One to travel to the West Coast, the top administration official in the foreclosure crisis, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan, held a White House briefing to declare that “we have not found any evidence at this point of systemic issues” in the manufacture of hundreds of thousands of false legal documents by mortgage bankers.

Donovan rejected any blanket moratorium on foreclosures, claiming, “We are focused on the process early, to keep people in their homes, rather than focusing late, when it is much less likely that people will be able to stay in their homes.” Translated into plain English, the administration policy is to pressure homeowners not to fall behind on their payments, rather than to rescue those who face eviction.

In a column in the *New Republic* magazine, liberal commentator John B. Judis observed that on the question of home foreclosure, “President Obama’s approach more closely mirrors Herbert Hoover’s than FDR’s.” This was disastrous economically, he argued: “A recovery will depend on increasing consumer demand, not boosting bank capital. And to do that, the administration needs an effective program that will allow working Americans to liquidate their debts without being thrown out on the streets.”

The administration’s indifference was also disastrous politically, he complained, given that the states hardest hit by foreclosures include such electoral battlegrounds as Nevada, Florida, California, Michigan and Ohio. Judis concluded: “It’s the working-class voters who reluctantly backed Obama in 2008, but have been turned off by the impression that the administration cares more about the banks than about them. And there’s little in the administration’s rhetoric to persuade them otherwise.”

In his West Coast speeches, Obama sought to address the mounting economic discontent that is the driving force of the political debacle facing the Democratic Party. He admitted, “There’s no doubt this is a difficult election. It’s because we have been through an incredibly difficult time as a

nation.”

This argument fails to explain, however, why the Republican Party has been able to make a political comeback—something it could not do in 1934, two years into the first term of Franklin Roosevelt, although unemployment was far higher than today and living conditions for broad masses of people were far worse.

Obama pointed to the record of the Republican administration of George W. Bush in the eight years that culminated in the Wall Street crash of 2008, but did not explain how, only two years later, this thoroughly corrupted and discredited party is on the verge of recapturing control of Congress.

Unlike Roosevelt, Obama has offered nothing in the way of public works programs to restore employment, or significant checks on the most flagrant forms of Wall Street speculation. This is not merely a personal failing, or, to put more it precisely, Obama’s obvious indifference to the plight of millions of working people is not peculiar to him. It is the attitude of the entire social class, the top one percent in American society, which all the Democratic and Republican politicians represent.

American capitalism is no longer able to provide any significant reform measures. It is an economically declining power, the largest debtor nation on the planet. Consequently, there is no constituency in the American financial aristocracy for economic policies that make any concessions to the masses. Hence the spectacle of record profits and bonuses on Wall Street, while the White House rejects any aid to jobless workers facing foreclosure and eviction.

White House officials concede, albeit not publicly and on the record, that they expect the Republican Party to win control of the House of Representatives, and the president’s main electoral focus has been to safeguard Democratic control of the Senate and of governorships of key states.

There are mounting indications that the administration not only expects to share power with the Republicans after November 2, but that the White House positively welcomes this prospect and is preparing a further shift to the right in both domestic and foreign policy.

In his interview with the *New York Times* magazine published on Sunday, Obama told reporter Peter Baker that Republican gains would not necessarily be a defeat for him. Baker wrote: “Obama expressed optimism to me that he could make common cause with Republicans after the midterm elections. ‘It may be that regardless of what happens after this election, they feel more responsible,’ he said, ‘either because they didn’t do as well as they anticipated, and so the strategy of just saying no to everything and sitting on the sidelines and throwing bombs didn’t work for them, or they did reasonably well, in which

case the American people are going to be looking to them to offer serious proposals and work with me in a serious way.’”

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell responded by telling the Associated Press that he hoped to work more closely with Obama on tax cuts, trade agreements and other economic policies.

White House adviser Valerie Jarrett, one of Obama’s closest cronies, told the CBS program “The Early Show” Wednesday that Obama still held out hopes of bipartisan cooperation with the Republicans. “He’s not going to give up on that,” she said. “He’s going to keep trying, no matter who’s in Congress.”

Another area where bipartisan cooperation is already well established is in foreign policy, particularly in Obama’s continuation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where he has had greater support among congressional Republicans than among some sections of the Democratic Party. Obama retained Bush’s secretary of defense, Robert Gates, and escalated the Afghanistan war as troops became available from Iraq.

Obama was notably silent on foreign policy in his remarks to the first two rallies on the West Coast, where opposition to the Iraq war has been strong. The word “Afghanistan” did not appear in speeches in Portland or Seattle, and there was only one passing reference to Iraq, when he boasted of having withdrawn 100,000 troops from that country—without mentioning that more US troops are now deployed in the two countries than when George W. Bush was president.

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