

The Nation backs Obama after anti-Plan B contraception ruling

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On December 7, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Kathleen Sebelius overruled the FDA's decision to limit age restrictions on over-the-counter sales of the emergency contraception drug, Plan B. It was the first time that an HHS Secretary has ever contradicted an FDA finding.

The following day, in a press conference, President Obama went out of his way to explicitly support the Secretary's decision, saying, "It has been deemed safe by the FDA. Nobody is challenging that. When it comes to 12-year-olds or 13-year-olds, the question is can we have confidence that they would potentially use Plan B properly."

In fact, the FDA finding was the result of a ten-year process, which included a study by the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, which declared Plan B safe and effective for use by adolescent females, from age 11, without the supervision of a health care professional. Before this week's announcement, approval was considered to be a foregone conclusion. Though the Obama administration's reversal caught the liberal feminist establishment by surprise, it has swallowed the insult and proclaimed its continuing loyalty to Obama and the Democratic Party.

Katha Pollitt, the feminist-in-residence at *The Nation*, took up her pen on December 8 to ostensibly take the administration to task. The resulting column, *HHS: Let's Treat All Women Like Children*, is a cowardly piece demonstrating, once again, the impotence of this layer in the face of attacks on democratic rights.

Pollitt takes the president and Sebelius at their word, assuming that the motivation for the actions of the ruling elite can be divined by examining what they say, rather than the political and class interests they serve. She writes, "If Sebelius is really worried about what kids can purchase at Duane Reade, she should start with products that actually can be used dangerously."

This is simply beside the point. Sebelius was not worried about the risks from using Plan B, which are minimal. Rather, the Obama administration was making a calculated political appeal to build up support among more backward political forces as part of Obama's re-election campaign, knowing that Pollitt and similar figures would continue to support him anyway.

Pollitt quickly assures her readers that her supposed anger over Plan B will not prevent her from supporting Obama in the future: "He must be assuming that we are captive voters—we have no place to go. That may be true, but there's trudging to the polls and there's passion. Obama is never going to get passion from anti-choicers and swing voters. And it looks increasingly likely that he won't get it from pro-choice women either."

Such flaccid comments are not criticism, but a declaration of loyalty by Pollitt. The social layer for which she speaks values its ties to the Democratic Party and to pro-capitalist politics far more than the issues of women's democratic rights that it claims to defend. This is what enabled the Obama administration to act on Plan B as it did, confident that Pollitt, *The Nation*, and other liberal organizations would mount no opposition to its reactionary decisions.

Safe in this knowledge, Obama pursues the right-wing measures he was put in place to enact: destroying workers' rights and wages, dismantling the education system, expanding imperialist wars in the Middle East, and attacking democratic rights—including those of women.

Pollitt is hardly alone in her loyalty to these policies. In the *Huffington Post* on December 8th, Cecile Richards, the president of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, wrote a 852 word op-ed in response to the Plan B ruling without once citing the ruling itself. She refers to the "hysteria" of Plan B's opponents, but is careful not to level criticism at the deserved mark. Nowhere in the

article do the words Sebelius or *Obama* or *Democrat* appear, even though it is from these quarters that right-wing opposition to contraception currently finds its most effective support.

Lorraine Berry on *RH Reality Check* expresses this in a groveling way in her editorial, which is framed as an appeal to Obama: “I’m an idiot. I keep hoping against hope that you’re not going to throw women under the bus.”

On the same web site, Kari Ann Rinker of the National Organization of Women (NOW) writes: “Today’s news about our own Kathleen Sebelius’ overruling the FDA...serves as one more nail in the women’s rights coffin...jointly constructed by the Republican AND Democratic Party. As a lifelong, 3rd generation Democrat, I feel like a red-headed stepchild born of two blond parents, slightly out of place and wondering to whom I really belong.”

For decades, this social layer has dedicated itself to the proposition that the ills of American society could be addressed by installing representatives of various racial or sexual groups in top positions of the American capitalist state. Obama’s election as the first black president and his nomination of women in various top positions were declared a triumph.

At the time of Sebelius’ appointment, NOW declared her to be a “strong supporter of women’s reproductive rights,” and a “welcome change at a department that, for the last eight years, has favored ideology over science and worked to block women’s access to reproductive health care services at every turn.”

After Sebelius’ Plan B announcement, supported by Obama, their political role is now on display for the entire world to see.

The reactionary implications of the feminist identity politics espoused by Pollitt emerged most clearly in her position on the invasion of Libya. In a March 2011 article, she took *The Nation*’s Robert Dreyfuss to task, for writing that Obama needed to “rein in his warrior women”—a collection of officials including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, human rights advisor Samantha Power, and UN Ambassador Susan Rice, who pushed for war against Libya.

Pollitt evaded the question of whether she supported the war, calling herself “apprehensive,” then echoed the pro-imperialist arguments being advanced to justify it: “people of good will can still see it as preferable to standing by as Qaddafi butchers the rebels, as he promised to do.” For her, however, the main issue was not

imperialist war—which would lead to tens of thousands of deaths under NATO bombings and at the hands of NATO-led rebels, or the plundering of Libya’s oil wealth and infrastructure.

What *really* mattered to Pollitt was that someone had dared to say something against the women who helped lay the groundwork for the war. She attacked this not on the basis of its political position for or against the war, but for its perceived misogyny: “In any case, the fact that three women argued for it skillfully and won their point is not very interesting. So why stress it, except that it mobilizes a raft of misogynist tropes about castrating females, the dangers of petticoat government and the folly of expecting anything good to come out of gender equality?”

This is the writing of someone with no sense of the world outside her own pro-imperialist intellectual caste, and whose orientation is fixed firmly on affluent classes specializing in apologetics for the Democratic Party.

This is why Pollitt can react to the difficulties created for millions of working class women by the Plan B ruling with a declaration that she will vote for Obama—adding only the pathetic proviso that it will be without “passion.”

Pollitt speaks for a social layer that is insulated from and indifferent to the consequences of Sebelius’ decision. Pollitt, Richards, or their daughters may be inconvenienced by the new ruling, but they have the resources to get around the problems created by it. The problem of getting to doctors visits, co-pays, and other obstacles to obtaining medical care in America will not be difficult to overcome, as they are for millions of working women.

For them, however, breaking with Obama and the Democratic Party and calling on the working class to defend its rights would be unthinkable. In a political and economic climate where all the democratic rights won by the working class in the past century are coming under vicious attack, the reaction of Pollitt and her ilk to the Plan B ruling exposes them for who they are: enemies of the working class.



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