

Obama's acceptance speech: A compendium of half-truths and lies

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Barack Obama's speech Thursday night accepting the Democratic Party's nomination for reelection provided a fittingly cynical and demagogic conclusion to two weeks of media-scripted conventions staged by the two official parties.

The speech was at once hollow and dishonest. This was in keeping not only with the debased and anti-democratic character of US politics as a whole, but also with the particular role assigned by the ruling class to the Democratic Party. Its job is to create the illusion that it represents a more progressive and "pro-people" alternative to the unvarnished reaction espoused by the Republicans, thereby maintaining the political monopoly of the corporate-financial elite.

In attempting to make a case for his election to a second term, Obama resorted to gross distortions and outright lies about his record as president, the state of American society, and the policies to which he and the Democrats are committed going forward.

The formulation of these fabrications and the rhetorical tricks used to promote them were conditioned by the multiple audiences Obama was seeking to address.

There were the convention delegates in the hall, drawn overwhelmingly from privileged layers of the middle class, including hundreds of trade union functionaries; well-off sections of African-Americans, Hispanics and other minorities whose wealth and careers are bound up with identity politics; Hollywood producers and celebrities; and Democratic Party operatives and office-holders.

There was the television audience, for whom it was necessary to promote an image of concern for the plight of ordinary people and resistance to the demands of Wall Street.

There was the milieu of liberal and pseudo-left organizations that had to be supplied political pabulum to justify their support for Obama and the Democrats as the "lesser evil."

And there were the corporate oligarchs, to whom Obama had to provide assurances that his demagoguery was not to be taken seriously, and their interests would continue to be

secured in a second Obama term.

The core conceit of the speech—and of the entire Democratic Party campaign—was Obama's assertion early on that the American people face a stark choice in November "between two different paths... between two fundamentally different visions for the future."

This myth was echoed in much of the media reportage on the speech. The *New York Times*, for example, wrote on Friday, "the two parties, if nothing else, delivered radically different visions for how to end the economic malaise that has afflicted the country since 2008."

In reality, both parties supported the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and both pushed massive cuts in social programs, layoffs and wage cuts to pay for it. Both now insist that these attacks be intensified after the election, whichever party wins.

In an attempt to give himself social reform credentials, Obama cited "the kind of bold, persistent experimentation that Franklin Roosevelt pursued during the only crisis worse than this one." Like virtually everything else Obama said, this attempt to link his candidacy with the New Deal was a preposterous falsification.

Roosevelt won a second term with a landslide victory because—as a highly class conscious representative of the bourgeoisie—he implemented serious social reforms, including large-scale public works and government hiring programs, so as to avert the threat of social revolution. He also jailed no small number of prominent bankers whose crooked dealings helped trigger the crash of 1929.

That was in a very different historic period, when American capitalism, despite the Depression, was the rising global industrial power. Decades of industrial decline and the rise to undisputed power of a parasitical financial aristocracy have undermined any possibility of a new "New Deal," or any serious program of social reform.

Obama's presidency has from day one been devoted to protecting the wealth and power of the Wall Street elite. He has opposed any public works programs to directly hire laid off workers, or any other measures that might threaten the

profits of the corporations. He intervened to block bills in Congress that would have limited executive pay at bailed out firms. Not a single top bank executive has been criminally prosecuted, let alone jailed, and just last month the Justice Department announced it would file no charges against Goldman Sachs.

Fearful of offending Wall Street, Obama immediately followed his allusion to Roosevelt with an assurance that he had no intention of implementing social programs to create jobs or alleviate the social distress spreading across the country. “And by the way,” he said, “those of us who carry on his [Roosevelt’s] party’s legacy should remember that not every problem can be remedied with another government program of dictate from Washington.”

Later on, Obama made a point of reiterating his obligatory homage to capitalism, declaring: “We honor the strivers, the dreamers, the risk-takers, the entrepreneurs who have always been the driving force behind our free enterprise system, the greatest engine of growth and prosperity the world has every known.”

He declared his opposition to “firing teachers or kicking students off financial aid,” and proclaimed, “no child should have her dreams deferred because of a crowded classroom or a crumbling school.” But he and his education secretary, Arne Duncan, have praised the witch-hunting and firing of teaches across the country, promoted charter schools and other schemes to dismantle and privatize public education, and reduced access to college loans for millions of young people.

Just this week, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities published a study showing that 17 states have cut per-student education spending by more than 10 percent since 2008, and local school districts have slashed over 328,000 jobs.

In common with dozens of other speakers at the three-day convention, Obama seized on his forced restructuring of the auto industry as proof of his supposed pro-worker orientation. “We reinvented a dying auto industry that’s back on top of the world,” he crowed.

He failed to note that his plan included massive layoffs, cuts in retiree benefits, and an across-the-board 50 percent pay cut for new-hires, and declared, in an outright lie, that he was bringing jobs back to America “not because our workers make less pay.” He later claimed to champion paying auto workers “enough to buy the cars they build,” something that is excluded for tens of thousands of auto workers as a result of Obama’s wage-cutting program.

This attack on the working class—which has prompted a wave of wage-cutting across the economy—was the only concrete “boon” to the “middle class” that Obama could cite in the course of his address.

This travesty of populism was accompanied by repeated

appeals to economic nationalism and American chauvinism, evoking ugly chants of “USA! USA!” from the audience, no doubt led by the union officials in the hall.

Next Obama shifted to foreign policy and national security, boasting of his extrajudicial assassination of bin Laden in an attempt to outflank his Republican opponent, Mitt Romney, from the right. This was followed by the statement, “As long as I’m commander in chief, we will sustain the strongest military the world has ever known,” along with repeated paeans to US troops, a boast about the US aggression in Libya, an affirmation of unqualified support for Israel, and a warning directed against Iran.

All of this was portrayed as a defense of “the rights and dignity of all human beings”—a claim that came just days after Obama’s Justice Department announced it was dropping any further investigation of torture and prisoner abuse under the Bush administration.

The double-talk that pervaded the speech—pseudo-populism for the general public, austerity and the free market for the ruling elite—could be seen in Obama’s declaration that after spending a trillion dollars on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, “it’s time to do some nation-building right here at home.” Lest there was any question that this was anything more than empty campaign rhetoric, he immediately pointed to his plan to cut the deficit by \$4 trillion and invoked the proposal for sweeping austerity measures made by his bipartisan debt commission.

Again, after denouncing Romney and the Republicans for proposing to gut Medicare, the health care program for seniors, Obama signaled his own commitment to slashing both Medicare and Social Security, declaring euphemistically that he would “reform and strengthen Medicare for the long haul” and take “the responsible steps to strengthen” Social Security.

Behind the bathos, double-talk and outright lying, Obama’s speech reflected the commitment of both big business parties, whatever their tactical differences, to carry out the dictates of the corporate oligarchy and impose conditions of poverty and exploitation on the working class not seen since the turn of the last century.



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