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**A Candidate for Change,
but not a Candidate of
a Social Movement
The African World
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

Probably like many of you, I have found myself reflecting on Senator Obama's choice of Senator Joseph Biden as his Vice Presidential running mate. From the standpoint of campaign strategy, I must say that it was a brilliant decision. Obama, sensing his own vulnerability on matters of foreign policy - in mainstream circles - picked a running mate with nearly impeccable credentials.

Yet, and we must be clear about this, the choice of Senator Biden clarifies two critical points: one, that the actual politics of this team are "liberal/centrist" and not what one would describe as progressive. The politics are, in other words, well within the mainstream and certainly within the realm of foreign policy, and yet do not represent a

fundamental break from the past. While I would argue that there is *potential* for a break, such an argument is purely speculative.

The second critical point is that we can now settle the question that Obama is not a candidate of a social movement. This does not mean that the Obama candidacy lacks for a mass base. Neither does it mean that the Obama candidacy has not tapped into significant mass sentiment for a rejection of the politics of both Bush and Clinton. What it does mean is that the recent shifts by Senator Obama, plus the choice of Joe Biden, while making a good degree of sense from the standpoint of mainstream campaign strategy, do not reflect a movement toward a new politics.

That said, I remain steadfast in support of the Obama candidacy. I do so because I am clear what the candidacy represents and what it does not. One does not have to support a candidate only because s/he represents a fundamental break with the past. Supporting candidates must be decided based upon an assessment of the moment, specifically, the overall balance of forces and the openings that can emerge through the victory of a specific candidate. In that regard, real politics are not the politics of anger and symbolism, but are the politics of coalition building with a long-term objective of changing the balance of power and, ultimately, introducing a new practice of politics.

In order to construct a real strategy, we have to be clear as to what stands before us. Throughout the months of the Obama campaign many activists - myself included - have cautioned against the deification of Barack Obama. Not only has the deification been a problem, it has led to the failure to recognize that receiving mass attention and gaining mass excitement does not equate with a social movement. Yes, people are in motion, but the motion is far from clear. They are looking for something different, but the objectives have not solidified. Rather, the mass base for the campaign rejects the corruption of the last eight years, but also rejects the velvet-covered steel bat of the Clinton era. This, however, does not translate, for example, into a movement against neo-liberal globalization. It is a sentiment for change. This is what distinguishes the candidacy - and its supporters - from a mass social movement.

We, on the Left side of the aisle, can build upon this sentiment if we reject symbolic politics of anger, and, if we are prepared to actually build progressive, grassroots electoral organizations that ally with other social movements. With regard to the symbolic politics of anger, frankly, we should have had enough of 3rd party candidacies that express our outrage with the two mainstream parties. Of course we are outraged, but our outrage, whether through third party candidacies or even many of our street demonstrations, is simply not enough. If we are really angry, then this must translate into a strategy based on the actual conditions we face in the USA.

To do any of this means building an electoral organization, something that too many of us shy away from, perhaps because we do not believe that it amounts to REALLY progressive political work. Lacking organization, we are condemned to howling in the dark, hoping to get someone's attention.

Certainly I would have preferred a more progressive VP nominee. And certainly I continue to have my misgivings, if not outright criticisms, regarding various stands that Senator Obama has taken. But I also realize that in the absence of an organized mass base, Senator Obama, like so many other liberals, will continue to vacillate and take stands that invariably cave into the political Right. Accountability can be demanded when behind the door to his Left are forces that can change the political balance on the ground, rather than just being mouths that roar.

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is the Executive Editor of

BlackCommentator.com, a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the book, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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