



**December 4 , 2008 - Issue 302**

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

## **The Strategy of Relying on "Good Faith"?**

**The African World**

**By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**

**BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

It has been interesting to watch and listen to a debate unfold among many progressives regarding how to assess the initial direction of President-elect Obama. I have, however, found a particular tendency a bit unsettling. It is a tendency to make certain assumptions regarding Obama's actual intent and then to project his decisions, for instance on appointments, as shrewd tactics to mask an otherwise progressive objective. With all due respect, I would offer: *not so fast*.

It is worth considering the facts on the ground, so to speak. And these facts are a bit complicated and somewhat contradictory. Obama's initial appointments (and unconfirmed appointments) have tended to be cut from the Bill Clinton cloth. Thus, on the face of it, one can accurately, and with no caricature, say that Obama is building a center-right administration. At best, one could say that it is socially liberal, but the depth of this liberalism is far from clear.

At the same time, and contained in different statements and proposals, there is a hint that Obama wishes to do something a bit different from Clinton-ian liberalism. He has been speaking about "green jobs" and a major commitment to infrastructure redevelopment. With his appointment of Tom Daschle he seems to be indicating that he wishes to push through some version of healthcare reform, and more than likely within the next two years. His views on foreign policy remain very contradictory, however and a source of real concern. Nevertheless, I would argue that an important conclusion here is that all is not lost.

Yet, I think that it is important to step back for a moment. On the one hand we should be very careful about throwing around words such as "betrayal." First, Obama made no

significant promises to progressives. He offered hints of a positive direction and I do not regret my having been a critical supporter of the Obama candidacy. But Obama did not run as a progressive. He ran as a rather undefined liberal. So, yelling about betrayal is both overstating the case as well as missing who Obama has always been.

Equally dangerous is the assumption that, because Obama is smart, he is hiding all of his progressive intent behind a wall of center-right personnel. An argument, for instance, that I recently read suggested that just as President Bush used Colin Powell (a center right as opposed to a maniacal right-winger) to push the Iraq invasion, so too will President-elect Obama use center right figures to cover for progressive actions. This argument has significant weaknesses. The most important is that it is entirely based on assumptions both about Obama's real intent as well as his relationship with his proposed Cabinet and advisors. It also misses the point that the Bush administration was a hard-lined administration and not solely because of Bush or Cheney. They surrounded themselves with individuals who reinforced their own maniacal right-wing views.

Cabinet Secretaries are not simply advisers. Unless Obama is to serve as the generalissimo of the USA rather than President, the Cabinet Secretaries will carry significant weight. They will be directing their departments and implementing their INTERPRETATION of the Obama doctrine. This is very different from a kitchen cabinet of advisors. In that regard, NOT choosing economists such as Joseph Stiglitz (and outspoken critic of the Washington economic consensus) or Nobel winner Paul Krugman may have pleased Wall Street, but it indicates that the economic policies that will be pursued will be led by individuals who, a matter of a few short weeks ago, were advancing radically different approaches. Yes, there is something called "redemption" but one must first confess one's sins. I have, however, heard few confessions.

So, the long and the short of it is that while condemnations of Obama as a betrayer completely exaggerate what is going on, relying on good-faith and the hidden intentions of the President-elect is a recipe for an upset stomach. We can only operate based on the facts on the ground and an analysis of historic patterns of the people involved. We must factor in the new situation, and based on that, one can make general conclusions. That said, the major message that needs to be conveyed at present is **not** to rely on good-faith or good-intentions, or the fact that many people may happen to like President-elect Obama or that he is using cyberspace in creative ways. The major message is that it is up to progressive social movements and activists to shape Obama and the Obama administration in the way that we believe it needs to be shaped. If we do anything else, we are engaging in wishful thinking.

In this regard, I wish there were more discussion - in the various media including, but not limited to the Internet - about the sort of organizing and base-building that needs to be done in order to create the means to shape this new Administration. Instead of either worrying about a betrayal, or on the other hand excusing away center-right appointments as a mask to really progressive intent, progressives should be thinking about what WE need to be doing to change the overall terms of discussion. In this sense, what we do in Black America can set the stage for this unfolding drama. If we rest on our euphoria over this historic victory and simply *hope* that the brother will do the right thing, we will find ourselves completely disarmed in the face of actions and/or policies that are contrary to our interests, and as a result, more than likely contrary to

the interests of the world's peoples.

If ever there was a time to remember the words from a famous 19th century speech, that time is now: "*If there is no struggle there is no progress...Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.*" - Frederick Douglass, 1857

[Click here to comment on any article  
in this issue or see what others are saying in the](#)  
**The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog**


**BlackCommentator.com** Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of, [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.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

Click Here To

CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To

CONTACT 

Your comments are always welcome.

### **e-Mail re-print notice**

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002 - 2008  
www.BlackCommentator.com  
All Rights Reserved