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**The Obama Presidency:
Clues as to How He Might Govern
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The Presidential victory of Barack Obama is the sixth time in the past 96 years that a Democrat has won an election after at least eight years of Republican control of the White House. Those elections were: Woodrow Wilson in 1912 (sixteen years of Republican control); Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 (twelve years); John F. Kennedy in 1960 (eight years); Jimmy Carter in 1976 (eight years); and Bill Clinton in 1992 (twelve years). Examining the Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Clinton administrations provides possible clues as to:

1. how President Obama might govern
2. what constraints he may face
3. what role Progressive social movements might play in influencing policy in Obama's administration

Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Clinton

President Roosevelt was elected three years into the Great Depression. FDR quickly implemented "New Deal" reforms, aimed to provide "Relief, Recovery, Reform." He initially faced resistance from corporations, Congressional Republicans and Southern Democrats. However, pressured by union militancy and other radical forces, FDR bucked those constraints and implemented the New Deal reforms. Most of dominant-corporate capital eventually realized that supporting his policies would, in fact, "save capitalism."

The New Deal did not bring the country out of the Depression - World War II spending

accomplished that end - but FDR provided economic relief to millions of American working class people. He also deepened Corporate-Liberalism - an ideological paradigm that had been erected during the Progressive Era (1900-1920) - through social welfare, Keynesian mechanisms, and regulation. That policy framework continued to be expanded through the mid-1960s, whereby the state managed and regulated the economy, reinforced the public sector, and provided opportunities and resources for working class people and the poor.

President Kennedy promoted an accelerated Corporate-Liberal agenda which included domestic social reform, civil rights, increased military spending, and heightened Cold War-containment policies. When JFK entered the White House, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing, putting pressure on Kennedy to enact civil rights legislation. However, blocked by Congressional Republicans and Southern Democrats, Kennedy was not able to fully achieve his domestic agenda.

President Kennedy aggressively confronted the Soviet Union, particularly in the Third World. This included shoring up the United States'-client regime in Vietnam and creating the Green Berets. In a use of "soft power," Kennedy also created the Peace Corps. The confrontation with the Soviet Union came to a head in the near-apocalyptic Cuban Missile Crisis in October, 1962. Importantly, in a major revision of the United States Cold War-containment policy, JFK - reeling from the missile crisis - negotiated a Test Ban agreement with the Soviet Union in 1963. (Ironically, that ban was signed on August 31, the same day as the Civil Rights Movement's March on Washington.)

Despite the limitations on Kennedy's domestic social policy, his rhetoric inspired many African-Americans and white, Latino, and Asian students to carry out Progressive social activism, including opposition to the Vietnam War once Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, escalated that war. Many "Sixties" youth continue to be socially involved today. President Johnson expanded economic and social reform, partly prompted by massive protests. However, involvement in Vietnam led to United States post-World War II hegemony becoming severely weakened; a process which added to the rapid collapse of Corporate-Liberalism.

President Clinton was elected after twelve years of Ronald Reagan's Neo-Liberal policies. Those policies included deregulation, rolling back social programs, privatization, tax cuts, and weakening unions. He was also elected after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Relieved that the Republicans were out of the White House, the Liberal-left assumed that Clinton would represent a Progressive turn and did not rigorously pressure him for a "Peace Dividend," social welfare, or environmental reform.

With the Liberal-left on the side-lines, Clinton, who was a member of the Democrat's pro-corporate Democratic Leadership Council, moved the country further to the Right. His Neo-Liberal-centrist policies included deregulation of the telecommunications industry, welfare reform, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and repealing the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act, which further deregulated the banking industry. Clinton was also able to increase military spending despite the "end of the Cold War" and esca late United States military aggression in Yugoslavia and the Middle East in pursuit of absolute global hegemony.

The Obama Presidency and "Change"

Like Franklin Roosevelt, Barack Obama has been elected in the midst of an historic global economic crisis, a crisis which many assume will be more definitive than the Great Depression. He also inherits two wars in the Middle East to which the public is over-whelmingly opposed. In fact, a majority of the population who voted for him expects that Obama will withdraw from Iraq (and hopefully Afghanistan), revive and restructure the national economy, and end dependence on oil. Interestingly, the situation Obama inherits has raised the question among numerous commentators: Will Obama be another FDR?

During his campaign, Presidential-candidate Obama proposed a politics of "change", a politics which many supporters have interpreted as Progressive reform. However, his proposals do not challenge corporate interests, whether they relate to health care, education, energy, infrastructure, or transportation. Obama also advocates increasing military spending, expanding the military, redeploying troops from Iraq to Afghanistan to expand the war there, and confronting alleged "terrorists" in Pakistan.

Moreover, Obama is closely wedded to Wall Street. This is seen by campaign contributions from Wall Street, and his close association to former Secretaries of the Treasury Robert Rubin and Larry Summers. Both served during the Clinton administration and were architects of the deregulation of the banking industry. Rubin is a former Goldman Sachs CEO while Summers is rumored to be Obama's pick for Treasury Secretary. Owing to the severity of the economic crisis, these advisors do recognize the need for a new banking regulatory regime, but whatever they propose, it will certainly not undermine the interests of finance capital.

In fact, this writer argued in an article on this site in February that Obama had been handpicked by "enlightened" interests within the ruling class to put a new face on United States imperialism in reaction to the disaster that the Bush-Cheney administration has created. (Nothing that has happened pertaining to Obama's campaign has altered my view on that.) This approach is intended to reassert United States hegemony throughout the world. As a by-product to that objective, not unlike President Kennedy, Obama has also inspired "Hope" in the role of the United States government among a majority of the populace, after eight years of disillusionment with Bush and Cheney. In fact, millions of youth and African-Americans have registered Democrat because of Obama. This "Hope" has a way of defusing social discontent owing to the growing crisis, which the United States ruling class is fearful might generate into widespread social disruption.

Furthermore, Obama's policies aim to "save" United States capitalism by attempting to re-stabilize the economy and reassert United States financial hegemony. However, these objectives may be impossible for President Obama to achieve. This is because:

1. the globalized nature of the United States economy
2. the fact that the United States does not produce anything that the rest of the world wants or needs the limited resources the government has because of the budget deficit, the national debt and the trade deficit
3. the growing restiveness of the European nations, China, Russia, Brazil and India to the fall-out caused by the last 30 years of Neo-Liberal policy

For example, there is strong indication that these countries are moving away from the dollar as the reserve currency of choice. If this occurred the United States economy would quickly collapse and the country would cease to be the world's hegemonic power.

How Will Obama's Supporters React to his Centrist-Pro-Corporatist Policies?

Certainly, unlike the 1930s, there is presently no organized union militancy to pressure the President for Progressive change. Also, will the young Obama supporters curtail their political involvement once he is inaugurated (like the Liberal-left did during the Clinton's administration), or will they be politically vigilance and active, blocking Obama's pro-corporatist agenda while demanding Progressive change (like in the 1930s and the 1960s)? Moreover, if Obama does not carry out domestic and/or foreign policies that meet with their expectations, such as withdraw completely from Iraq or fail to revive the economy, will they usher in a new epoch of militant social protest, and even become real Socialists?

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