

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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Cover Story

Defeating A 3-Headed Monster

By Dr. Steven Pitts, PhD

BC Editorial Board

The election is over. Barack Obama won again. His victory is our victory because the forces lined up behind Romney represented economic elitism, white supremacy, and religious-based authoritarianism...a three-head monster whose agenda is opposed to anything that approaches a progressive view on society. The threat is not over...and not only because the Right still controls the House of Representatives or because of the deep roots the Right has dug in segments of the population or because of the deep financial coffers supporting this movement. The threat is not over because there is not a clear opposing vision deeply rooted in the neighborhoods and communities of the country. This political vacuum is particularly problematic given the nature of our battle against the Right.

One key to all political successes is "to unite the many to defeat the few". To continue to hark back to another slogan of my youth, we must engage in "united front" politics to defeat the Right. This is why they lost on Election Day. A slim majority of voters united to reject the Right's efforts to consolidate power in another branch of the government. In the current political context, where the Right is trying to roll back hard-fought gains from the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the Great Society through the use of Federal legislation, Barack Obama is the leader of this united front. Unfortunately, progressive forces have little capacity to influence and/or constrain him. Over the past four years, Obama has shown himself to be a weak leader of this

united front in the sense that he has fought a tactical battle with the Right on issues and with a frame that they have selected. So, instead of talking about the need to fight income inequality, structural racism, or create good jobs, he is leading the fight around the fiscal cliff and exploring "Grand Bargains" This terrain is the Right's terrain with no solution boding well for communities of color and working people.

However, his weaknesses do not invalidate the necessity of building a broad coalition of people against the Right. It does highlight the question of **how** to build the coalition. For me, one of the most frustrating aspects of the pre-election debate among elements of the Left concerning Obama was the absence of a discussion over how the Left uses this period to build power. For some, it seemed as if criticizing Obama or engaging in symbolic actions were the central pathways toward building power. But power-building is a complicated process of creating institutions which can challenge the status quo. As these institutions are built, it will be easier to fight the Right and push/pull the united front down a more consistently progressive road. Without these steps, we will continue to participate in political struggles as relatively ineffectual junior partners and these struggles will be fought on the Right's terms. There needs to be a discussion over how to build institutions deeply rooted in local community and then determine how those organizing utilize united front strategies to transform local areas.

Finally, during the campaign season, there was a lot of talk about the relationship between Obama and the Black community. For any number of reasons, Obama will never be the spokesperson for the unique needs of our community. In particular, he will never lead a fight for Black economic justice. Obama is part of a segment of the community that feels the solution to the unemployment and low-wage work crisis is more education, job training, and/or Black entrepreneurship. While better schooling, training, and Black businesses are strategies with some usefulness, the real solution to the Black jobs crisis is building power through organizing Black workers. Most workers, regardless of race, have fared poorly in the labor market for the past 40 years. Black workers bear the additional burden of having to fight institutional racism in the labor market. In the context of today's corporate globalization, most small businesses must operate in an economic context where giants such as WalMart force them to treat their workers poorly. Economic justice - better wages & benefits, a voice at work, and a discrimination-free workplace - can only be achieved through organizing workers in order to build power to restructure the economy. Black economic justice can only be

won by organizing Black workers. One task for the Black Left is to organize Black workers: if they are in unions, organize them to strengthen their unions and fight racism on the job; if they are not in unions, organize them to form Black worker centers that can act as local movement centers in the jobs arena and fight for quality jobs and access to good jobs. Without this activism and subsequent transformation of the economy, all of the good work around mass incarceration, education, and other issues will have reduced effectiveness.

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