

Obama, Structural Contradictions, and Imperatives

(A Post Script)

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This paper is a post script to an article titled “Systemic Imperatives, contradictions and the Democratic Process in the USA” which I published in 2009. It is a reflection on Obama’s presidency in light of the structural contradictions and imperatives and in particular it is an outline of the attack on or in defense of the person of Obama and as the President while neglecting the structural contradictions and systemic imperatives. By structure I mean an ensemble of powerful groups with material interests, rules and hierarchy. Structural contradictions are contradictory, problematic and irresolvable relationship between various components of the structure, and the systemic imperatives are the commandments—essential policy approach for survival of the structure (indebtedness, and mechanism of implementing social imperialism). Obama presents a unique case at the level of agency as did his role models President Abraham Lincoln, President John F. Kennedy and President Ronald Reagan. He is an African-American, an idealist, a scholar and aims at consensus building.

But Obama appeared on the scene at a difficult time. On the domestic front, the economic, social and political life was characterized by fear and uncertainty and on the foreign front, the immediate future of global political and economic conditions were uncertain at best. The uniqueness was also

evident in the fact that the long and expensive political campaign for the Presidency of the United States began against Obama in the first year of Barack Obama's Presidency which by comparison was unprecedented. The "right" and the "left" (as defined in the American political context) of the polity, media, the economy, education, and culture began articulating the shape of things to come as they saw them. On the right of the political spectrum, the criticism of Obama's domestic and foreign policy expressed by the argument that the election of Obama as the first African American President, signaled the end of racism, while making America vulnerable to all anti-American forces (code word for Muslims, communists and socialist), higher taxes, anti-business policies and the expansion "nanny state" with a corrupt welfare programs. The left of the political spectrum joined the jubilation that we are going to see the end of abject poverty, the "Conservative nanny state," (welfare program for the rich), discrimination, militarism, wars and social exclusion. The debate between the two camps often ends in shouting, anger, agreement and genuine concern, but for the most part only concerned with the symptoms of structural contradictions. Campaign slogans are symptoms of contradictions and the variations in policy orientation reflect the historical lines along party politics. Criticism of government intervention, on the one hand and a criticism of the President for "not doing enough" is a well known contemporary campaign slogan.

Yet doing enough means formulating and implementing policies and intervening in the economy. What they are saying in reality is that the government is not providing sufficient incentives to the business sector – the "job creators." Therefore, in their view any government intervention that does not provide incentives for the business sector is anti-market, anti-freedom and un-American. When historically grounded, it becomes obvious that the Democratic Party follows the principles outlined by FDR in the 1930s. These principles including counter cyclical policies in the form of government spending to stimulate demand have been the guides by which the Democratic Party slogans are

constructed while the Republican Party adopted the Ronald Reagan scheme of less government and liberation from regulation as part of the global hegemony of capital and the ideology of neo-liberalism. Overtime the political and economic line of demarcation between the two parties has been blurred. The global policies of neo-liberalism had the goal of restoring capital accumulation on a global sale. In the process of implementing the policies towards global accumulation, it was critical for labor to submit to austerity measures in the form of lower wages, commodity inflation, and reduction in non-defense (social services) spending. The reduction in social spending was accompanied by an unprecedented increase in military spending drowning the country in debt. Deficit spending became the norm rather than exception since the rise of neo-liberalism and its accumulated amount – the national debt of over \$14 trillion (1).

Today the political debate rarely grounds the causes of this structural problem in its history and the need to borrow as an imperative rarely admitted. They are either unseen, or misunderstood, but their consequences are invariably viewed as the fault of the individual in office. In this context and indeed throughout the history of structure/ agency debate, the role of the agency has been magnified often at the neglect of the structure in place. The diseases afflicting the modern- democratic body politics are not revolts, demonstrations, coup d' etat, social unrest and corruption, they are alienation, estrangement, apathy and powerlessness of the masses whose consent is absolutely essential to the reproduction and the survival of the system. To garnish the necessary consent, the political institution represented by the state along with other components of the superstructure (institutions) such as religion, education, media, and entertainment and so on must aid the state through various means. At first glance, the term consensus resonates well with those espousing and advocating pluralism (everyone is an equal participant), but with the critical framework presented by Antonio Gramsci, it is the basis of hegemony—domination of political and civil society by one group. What has facilitated the consensual

domination throughout its existence is the perfection of mode of legitimation and the internalization of dominant values perceived by the masses as what Gramsci called “common sense”. These perceived legitimate values ultimately find their way into social institutions which transmit them to the next generation. The consensual domination or what Gramsci calls “hegemony” is by far the most effective method of domination and social control that no amount of structural violence can achieve. The success of consensual domination requires a powerful political state capable of coercion, and mediation between competing classes.

From its inception, the nature, role and the purpose of state has generated much debate. In the Western political philosophy famous political treaties of John Lock, Thomas Hobbs, W.E. Hegel, Jean Jacque Rousseau, and others are the precursors to modern liberalist, idealist and empiricist views of the state. From the Industrial Revolution through the turbulent second half the nineteenth century, an elaborate discussion of the role of the state as the guardian of the interest of the ruling political and economic classes was a departure from the purely political treaties. Karl Marx in particular formulated a theory of state in which the state is reduced to an organization charged with the protection of the interest of the ruling class. Building upon Marx’s theory of the state, Marxists and Marxian theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century while maintaining the essentials, revised many of its features ---- (and) congruent with the changing concrete reality and they provided a rich conceptual repertoire. Gramsci’s concepts of “hegemony,” “historical bloc,” and “common sense,” were themes that drew attention to the impasse presented by the structure/ superstructure debate in Orthodox Marxism. Gramsci’s analysis of the hegemonic structure accords an important position for the intellectuals of every epoch—particularly the “organic intellectuals.” In my view the concrete components of the strategy of “social imperialism” as outlined by Schumpeter 1995? and Neumann (1944) find their conceptual labels in and are crystallized by Gramsci’s analysis of hegemony. While social imperialism

as a strategy is geared towards creating consensus for or eliminating obstacles for expansionist policies, hegemony conceptualizes a broader strategy for creating consensus for long term domination. In this strategy the “organic intellectuals” of the dominant class have an important role in the production of ideas vital to creating consensus. Theories of “capitalist states”, “state in capitalist societies” etc., were efforts to conceptualize the evolving role of the state from purely a protector of the interest of the upper class to being an important player in mediation between competing classes while maintaining relative autonomy in decision making. Paul Sweezy (1939), and Ralph Miliband (1969) conceptualized the role of the state as an “instrument” (hence instrumentalism) of the powerful ruling economic elite. Nicos Poulantzas (1973, 1976) allowed for the state as an agency to have sufficient autonomy to mediate between “fractions” of the upper class.

Contemporary Capitalist democracies are contractual constructs --they are negotiated entities. Ideally they are the product of negotiation between people and the political state. The reality however, suggest that parties to negotiation are for most part the components of the ruling political and economic classes independent of meaningful input from the people. In this context the feeling of alienation and powerlessness before turning into utter political apathy, is expressed as anger and cynicism toward the agency –the holder of the political office large or small. Seldom, the structural contradictions and the imperatives are identified and addressed. The agency, instead, becomes the sole responsible entity for the good, the bad and the ugly outcomes of policy. Agency is perceived as a force against the economic malaise, political instability, wars, and they are perceived as a unique registered trademark, causing recessions and indebtedness, etc., etc., or responsible for the economic boom and social comfort. In other words, the agency—the President is either competent, smart and loves his country or he is an incompetent, not so smart and a “traitor.” Occasionally they are also perceived as “nice” and “good,” but not fit to lead and vice versa. In this political landscape, individual politician of all stripes and position

and office, are elected or defeated. Occasionally they impeached for violation of certain rules of conduct. Considering the last few impeachments (Nixon and Clinton), they were impeached for breaking into rival's file cabinet or having extramarital affairs in the Oval Office respectively. No impeachment has ever occurred for illegal wars, invasions, massive dislocation of the economy as a result of pursuing the interest of powerful groups at the expense of the rest of society. From time to time a different breed of politician appears on the political scene and generates much enthusiasm and raises the hope of millions that positive, dramatic and implicitly structural changes are coming; that political division is ending and that the nation is on its way to reclaim its glory of not so distant past. President Obama is one of those Presidents whose reliance on the "hope" and "change" excited the hopeful and the highly excitable crowds.

The "Audacity of Hope" is the laments of an idealist politician/scholar whose mission is to rescue the "democratic" process from a certain collapse through consensus. Obama is disturbed that partisan political debate continues to erode the Public's trust. He believes that the public has the right to be weary of this approach to problem solving and that had to change. The manner in which he articulated this familiar concern particularly in its temporal context added an aura of urgency. In particular the appeal to the marginalized masses – victims of a very real economic condition rather than offended by ideological slogans and politicized issues such as abortion, homosexuality, evolution, and Obama as a Senator described a very obvious development that the economic and educational systems have failed the marginalized masses of America and that America still is the beacon of hope. Thus he proposed urgent school reform (unite as one) (while still taking position along the Democratic, Republican party line) and working to overcome the religious divide along party lines-- conservative/evangelicals on the one hand and the rest on the other. While Senator Obama was seeking the Presidency of the United States, his name (particularly his first and the middle names) and his race

became the focal point for the “conservative” and “right” wing groups both inside and outside of the structure. The left (Left in the American context which often include social critics in academia, the media, activists, and educators) including all of those with unbearable guilt brought on by the history of racial oppression ,rejoiced that the beautiful rainbow of hope has a permanent place under the sun. He (as do all Presidential candidates) presented himself as the voice of the American people, with particular attention to “subaltern”—the poor, the disabled, victims of racial and ethnic discrimination, and those suffering from political exclusion and economic violence. His election brought hope to the hopeless, courage to the scared and solace to the disturbed both at home and abroad. He inherited two costly wars, an economy on the verge of collapse under the weight of hedge fund managers, shadow bankers and Ponzi scheme charlatans, continued militarism and imperialism with socialized costs and privatized benefits, causing a crippling debt trap, and a poison pill called austerity ready to be administered to the public. Two and half years into his presidency, Obama has begun to see that idealism is no panacea for a very concrete reality created by structural contradictions and systemic imperatives.

The level of disrespect for President Obama has been unprecedented. The attack from the right under the guise of patriotism and the love of country has been relentless. The left on the other hand has been naïve in its expectations and criticism falling in the trap of only agency analysis. Worse than that is the presentation of Obama’s Presidency in terms of race and the racial dynamics rather than class and contradictions.

Structural Contradictions:

Embedded in all class based societies are several fundamental contradictions. But the complexity and the intensity of contradictions vary greatly with the level of articulation of the social, economic and political system. Contemporary capitalist systems are highly articulated mode and accordingly are

confronted with a set of complex contradictions. Here are the contradictions which I outlined and explained in the original article and believed as I do now are at the heart of the problem of what appears to be a political gridlock with respect to controversial issues in socio-economic and political life. On the basis of these persisting contradictions, I insist that the agency centered narratives as provided by most “Presidential” historians are narratives at best and within the confines of personality type and overall psychological framework. Indeed this type of modeling procedure obscures the agency/structure debate, further intensifying the sense of alienation and powerlessness. It negates or ignores the power of the structure in its ensemble of political, economic and military forces while promoting the agency as a routinized charismatic central figure. Even in face of the internationalization of the national state and in particular the development of a supranational state with the title of superpower, the psychological reductionism remains the norm.

The political economy of capitalism places special emphasis on the role of the state in governance and consumption. Governance beyond the daily operation may involve mediation between contending interests or may be in the form of oppression. Marx and Engels (1848) and later Lenin (1917) viewed the state as an oppressive bureaucracy representing the interests of the ruling class and its employees as the functionaries of the upper class. The complexity of European society in the aftermath of industrial revolution, required a more complex political apparatus and greater state intervention. In the Post World War II era, the rise of multinational corporations was accompanied by intensification of imperialist planning throughout the post-colonial world. In this context the question of the role of the state in the pursuit of the interest of the nation rather than solely the interest of the class in control of most of the resources guided the discourse in radical political economy. In capitalist democracies with an economy dominated by the private sector, the state must behave in a different fashion than the state in totalitarian, absolutist, military and dictatorial regime. In a modern capitalist democracy such as the

United States with an imposing global economic, political and military role, the state must adopt means of legitimation for the conduct of the policy if and when the policy is challenged by the populace. The practice of social imperialism both historically and contemporaneously has served to rally public support for a policy or policies which are often in conflict with what democracies are supposed to stand for.

Joseph Schumpeter (1919; 1951) viewed social imperialism as an imperialism in which the wealthiest property owners attempt to get the support of the working class for their imperialistic designs by improving the standard of living for labor. Similarly, Franz Neumann (1944) viewed social imperialism as a strategy on the part of the governing classes to incorporate the working class into an imperialistic system. The actual strategy involves the expansion of material benefits to secure popular support for aggressive imperialistic policies (1944:153-5, cited in Berman). Contemporary social imperialism differs markedly in approach and content. The global reach of the superpower alters the national political priorities to reflect the dynamics of the global political and economic priorities. Values and ideals of democracy, fairness and freedom are exportable views either via merchant(s) ships or war ships. As Wolin (2004, 2008), argues, it is only the superpower that has the ability to sell itself as the model of democracy for the rest of the World.... Yet at home it creates the impression of genuine political debate even though the players are power elite and their lobbyist. In other words, there is the political circus (a) awash (ed) with (in) special interest money but devoid of meaningful political content and honest discourse. Through this process the government gains legitimation by organizing “controlled elections” —a process which he calls a “managed democracy.” Managed democracy is characterized by the perpetual fear and insecurity and it becomes an “inverted totalitarianism.” "Exporting" democracy is a contemporary political slogan replacing the more condescending 19th century slogan of “civilizing mission” and the “White Man’s burden”. It is in this context that the autonomy of the institutions of the political order in general and the role of the state in particular must be gauged and evaluated. Can the

state be a guardian of the general economic interest rather than an instrument for domestic exploitation and global pillage? As of late, what I would call “the classic form of social imperialism” has been replaced by a different set of mechanisms such as a politics of fear and an ideology of patriotism. To address this issue, major structural contradictions must be delineated so as to understand the interplay of structural imperatives and the interest of the masses.

In the original article I argued that “...private sector dominance, predatory competition, the organic composition of capital (constant – machinery and variable --labor), ... are permanent features of capitalist economic system , while “interest peddling (lobbying), and the paradox of overproduction and under-consumption” , vary in scope and duration. Private sector dominance, predatory competition and a reduction in the ratio of labor to capital (organic composition) are absolutely essential for capital accumulation to proceed. What benefits the real economy and the people is of course the expansion of the real economy—the production base. But what is alarming is that the accumulation of capital is realized increasingly and with the aid of the state through speculations and securitization. The tendency for the expansion of capital in an unbridled private sector particularly under the umbrella of laissez faire and market fundamentalism inevitably leads to predatory competition. Predatory competition, mergers, and takeovers are sanctioned by laws and supported by the ideology of Social Darwinism. Yet concentration alone cannot guarantee a higher profit rate; for greater profit margins to be realized the organic composition of capital must be changed. That is the drive toward greater profit by way of increasing surplus value (in differentiated and advanced capitalist systems) through increasing the constant portion of capital (machinery and technology) and decreasing variable portion of capital (labor =payroll).” The end result is that as the constant portion of capital is increased, greater numbers of workers become idle with no means of consumption. As domestic payroll is reduced, then the possibility of increase in profit margin increases. The expansion of production base in “investment friendly”

overseas markets has been in response to a declining rate of profit at home “through internationalization” of capital and production. In the center the exploitation is realized through reduction in real wages and concessions first and foremost through union busting; in the periphery the exploitation is accelerated through longer working hours under difficult conditions. Both of these strategies are inimical to the idea of democracy. That is imperialism (both external and internal (social) are incompatible with democracy. In a democracy the prevailing belief is that people do understand the political process, they are “civilized” and their interests are not pursued through undemocratic means and social imperialism. Why would a democratic system need social imperialism as a strategy? Does it not contradict the essence of democracy? The answers to these questions are to be found in the deconstruction of the contradictions and systemic imperatives as well as an understanding of the role of the agency and the accompanying political slogans.

In the agency- structure dichotomy, agency occupies a place that is critical to an understanding of the structure. It is necessary to study the personality and the individual psychological make-up in so far as they react to the structural forces. Yet they do not allow for the possibility of broader discourse by virtue of the techniques and the repertoire. The emphasis on agency also raises questions about the law and the power of individuals. Within the democratic process, laws governing the action of political persons limit the propensity to violate structural dictates and if violated there are sanctions and penalties. The things that matter are the “vital national interests” which have always trumped the sphere of morality and ethics. Indeed the context of *realpolitik* does not allow much room for ethical consideration. Former President George W. Bush might think that he is the “The decider”, but the reality is that the decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq not his. It was the ensemble of powerful forces working in concert – the structure that made the decision. The decision to invade Afghanistan was made a part of larger strategy, immediately after the Soviet Union’s defeat in that country and the fate of Iraq

(not Saddam Hussien) was sealed immediately after Iraq was thrown out of the trap of Kuwait but this time notwithstanding the repeated stupidity of Saddam Hussien, began with a blockade, a no fly zone, it was ready to be conquered. These were seamless imperial policies which began with George Bush and maintain through Clinton's two terms culminating in the final blow to autonomy of most of the nation-states of the Middle East.

After the election, Obama continued to be viewed as suspect by the same group since in their mind he was moving the country towards "socialism" – the most un-American alternative political thought. The left within the United States as always has defended the rhetoric of "socialism" without much attention to substance and this is one reason for its loose usage and vulgarization. It has failed to separate socialism from the totalitarian system and the crowd has accepted it. President Obama has been called among others a "centrist" "pragmatist," socialist, a Muslim, un-American, a traitor, "anti-American" (ala Norman Podhoretz), and off course the dirty L word "Liberal" which has the same connotation as spineless, pro-poor and anti-rich among others. Podhoretz and Mellman and other pro-Israel lobby have been beating the drums of war against Iran, particularly before the actual invasion when they were certain of a quick victory over the dark forces. Even though their calculus was so wrong but they offered no apology and still try to open up another front paid by the American taxpayer and a treasury that was and it at the mercy of the creditors large and small, domestic and foreign. On the right side variety of books published by WND and Regnery and self-published with catchy titles and each title yet another label for Obama has surfaced during the past three years. Titles such as "rage", see the bibliography and on the "left" various articles which appeared early in Obama's Administration have gradually morphed into critical but limited to criticism of the policy—the symptom of structural contradictions and imperatives.

With regard to the labels of being Muslim, the realization that both his first and middle names are Arabic (therefore he must be a Muslim), provided ammunition for more labels. For instance, the label of “Obama the Socialist” came about, not because of the Healthcare bill but probably by the googling Obama and socialism and (have) coming across a paper by the Barak Obama senior on the topic of socialism. The paper is merely an indictment of the government of Kenya’s plan for post-colonial reconstruction and it is a matter of questioning the internal logic of the argument. I did not mention Obama Sr. paper on socialism in the original article because I never thought it was relevant. Now tracing its sources, it is important to point out pertinent passages upon which socialism of Obama is constructed. The number of books and articles on these issues ranging from “Obamanomics,” and “Obamacare” to wishful multicultural thinking in Utopian fields andfrom both sides of the political spectrum all decidedly neglected the essence of the systemic contradictions by perpetuation of individualism as an ideology anchored in the “survival of the fittest.” It is noteworthy that the application of individualism has been in this case selective to say the least. Is criticism of policy by the right and the left an explication of the contradictions? Reciting the redacts, talking head solitude, rhetorical discussions in the jingoistic media cannot provide solace to the poverty stricken, politically alienated who even lack the “audacity of hope.” The so called left in particular provided a shameful front --on the one hand, it began criticizing the criticism of the Administration for the first two years and now it is time to switch to just to be on the safe side as do most lobbyist. When journalists are de-facto historians and political strategists and reaffirm the organicity of the intellectuals in its most entrenched form. It is of a matter of journalistic laziness, or ineptitude that major structural issues are not as thoroughly discussed as womanizing of a President and the subsequent impeachment, or breaking into a rival’s file cabinet, but jingoistic and apologetic media will never take on major violations such as illegal invasions and wars.

In the area of foreign policy, Obama inherited three dilemmas , the continued invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and the world wide labor migration as exemplified by the politicized US/Mexican border as crossing point for Central and South American migrant workers. On Palestinian/Israeli issue: Obama continues to think in the words of Uri Avnery, that it is “raining” even though the “Israelis are spitting on his face.” Televangelists, the hard core pro-Israel Christian Zionists and all of the politicians of both parties who defend Israel for variety of reasons, have remained steadfast in their support of Israel no matter what the consequences for the Palestinians, the Israeli public and the Americans. Thus one must consider an attack on Obama’s plan for the so-called “Middle East Peace” (even though it should be called a unilateral Israeli policy towards the occupied territories to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state), primarily for public consumption (2). Even the suggestion of a unilateral declaration of a Palestinians state, has been rebuffed with the threat of U.S. veto. This powerlessness has led to the notion that there is no such thing as an Obama Doctrine. Yet militarism may be conducted with or without a clearly defined doctrine and it will be every bit as deadly and brutal, even when it is erroneously perceived as carrying out a democratic "mandate." The “vital national interests of the United States”, or the American “way of life” are often heard during campaigning for the office and the means of implementing that guiding principle is in conflict with professed moral authority and the democratic ideals. Obama’s doctrine has been in the context of “realpolitik” but with deviation from the classic through injection of pragmatism—contextualized. But it is very difficult to define the parameter of his doctrine and it is very possible and I do believe that it is very difficult to have a doctrine which can fulfill the dictates of the structure –the imperial imperatives in the current global socio-economic and political milieu, while simultaneously not undress some of the contradictions. It is clear that in the in the post-Iraq and Afghanistan, the legitimacy of imperial political decisions, violation of international law, the dictates of the US constitution and the problem of image

have forced a rethinking of the tools and techniques in the public relation strategy.. After all, the intention is to rescue the badly “tarnished” global image in the aftermath of “preemptive” policy of George W. Bush and the deadly and costly consequences of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The linkage between the global role of the empire as protector of the interest of the bearer of capital and the persistent contradictions on the domestic political and economic front is highlighted by the level of privatization of the benefits and the socialization of the cost of intervention. Available data on income distribution and the control over wealth show a widening gap of an obscene proportion between the rich and the rest of the American society. Even if we ignore the problem caused by control of wealth by a small percentage of the population (including most of the government officials), reduction in income alone causes great social dislocation; lack of access to health care on the part of an estimated fifty million Americans and an estimated twenty million Americans (including children, the elderly and the disabled) not having enough food are examples of under-consumption problem. On the one hand, a loss of income on the part of the workers in the center (domestic consumers) leads to a reduction in income elsewhere. As the availability of profitable investment opportunities increase production abroad increases adding to the stock of available goods. These developments create the two facets of the third contradiction - the overproduction and under-consumption dilemma. Both facets are caused by the drive toward higher profits. However, the internationalization of production and globalization (imperialism) has been accompanied by a declining earning power in various centers of global capitalism and deepening economic depression. That is while the gain from globalization is privatized, the loss as illustrated by the recent crisis caused by variety of Ponzi schemes is socialized. Collateralization, predatory lending through the use of newly

invented financial instruments and the debt trap are the building block of what is now called financialization. And financialization is an attempt at making more profit through speculation on a global scale and for it to happen there must be a structure (with all of the necessary institutional support, rules, and regulations and a public which is either ignorant or apathetic) which allows such schemes.”

In a very short period of time, the cost of the collapse of the institutionalized Ponzi scheme, exemplified by the unraveling of the real estate industry and the financial institutions responsible for the scheme were all socialized by way of bailouts, while the profit remained in the private hands. Consequently, the call for austerity measures is loud and clear. Structural contradictions are not negotiable but their cost and who pays for them is. One of the outcomes is austerity. Who could imagine that the ‘shining city’ on the hill imposes austerity, but not under Obama, under the champion of the free market President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. The solution to economic malaise continues to be presented in the form of borrowing and reduction in social services and again no one ought to view it as a matter of political party decisions as opposed to contradictions at the level of structure. Indebtedness inevitably brings austerity. Austerity that once was imposed on the poor and the developing countries now applied to countries not in that category including the imperialist zone. Greece—the weakest link in the chain of Western European economies is about to be thrown out of the Euro zone for not being able to implement all of the components of the austerity measure. In the United States the dominant parties --Democratic and the Republican parties have difficulty keeping even the appearance of differences in light of the contradictions intact. The reality is much more complex. The twentieth century Presidents all have aspired and invariably and true to form all have produced mandates and the means of delivery. Yet by looking at Obama’s policy in the past two and half years, we see the following components; rollback of some of the regulations, cuts in education, increase military

spending (4), increase implementation of ‘humanitarian imperialism’, ‘war of necessity’ and ‘humanitarian intervention’ etc. etc.,

As the contradictions unravel, the imperatives may become more ruthless. Current imperatives are 1) reliance on borrowing, 2) easing of the regulations (interesting that one of the biggest environmental agencies the EPA was created by Nixon, a Republican President), 3) increasing police surveillance, 4) military spending, 5) jingoism and the art of diversion, 6) lower wages and increased productivity, 7) and long term austerity measures. The emphasis (as a systemic imperative) is on the reproduction of the mode of legitimation and excessive surplus appropriation rather than the interest of society at large. For hope to triumph over despair, the brutal world of discrimination and deprivation must end. Outside of the United States, Barack Obama became “the voice of subaltern” From the streets of Kenya, to Brazil to Cairo, to Tripoli, to China and beyond he signaled the possibilities that exist. “There is the Obama as the role model for the young of all ethnic groups particularly the African Americans whose population has always been an expendable group and has suffered many attempts at total decimation. Interestingly, these groups' hope for the future is matched by the jubilation on the part of those "burdened" with the "white guilt." It is a double-edged sword. It is “the joy, the hope, the promise, and the role model that could reinforce ideas of empowerment” (Shariati, 2009).

The belief that Obama’s presidency may heal the racial wounds and narrow social divide was conditioned on addressing the core structural determinants “...which are the causes of the problem. While the hope must be kept alive, apathy and powerlessness must be challenged. And “Within a "democracy," contradictions must be addressed and each person must ask how the system must behave, what are its aims and where should it be on the global stage. This has a long tradition in America where individuals are expected to be cognizant of the rights and the responsibilities of being a citizen.” The forces allied with despair are too powerful and opportunist. By looking at the “organic intellectuals,” the

promoter of “common sense” belief system, the jingoistic media and the apolitical, apprehensive about and not so sure of itself, Academia along with other components of the superstructure, one can become so disillusioned and feel so alienated and powerless that being a responsible citizen is too overwhelming. Contemporary challenges for the citizens are not only in the areas of economic insecurity, everyday fear, powerlessness, and disillusionment, they are also in the form of mind control mechanisms of dystopia. Here are some of a book with catchy title and short of honesty and substance written by the lower level ideologues of the structure for the ordinary but scared crowd. Stanley Kurtz describes Obama's ideology as "stealth socialism" and aims at publicizing "Barack Obama's secret." Kurtz consider the President guilty of “systematically” disguising “.....his socialist convictions...” This is the essence of Kurtz argument for “Anti-Americanism” of Obama and his secret war on America. Welcome to the misleading and dishonest world of born again McCarthyism in the 21st century. Even though the label of “socialist” by now ought to be viewed as redundant, it is important to note how the malicious application of the concepts continues with impunity. It is certainly indicative of the vulgarity by which the critical issues are politicized, twisted and presented to a distrusting yet gullible public.

While Kurtz and his peers are not academic scholars and committed social and political scientists, Dinesh D’Souza is an academician. D’Souza accuses Obama of having “socialist’ thinking and plans. In an article in Forbes titled “How Obama Thinks,” D’Souza uses a convoluted logic in attempting to prove that Obama maybe a socialist. Apparently D’Souza believes that a person’s thought process is an inherited trait—purely biological in the manner that we inherit skin pigmentation, eye color and so on. Why don’t we remove the children from the environment that the parents thinking might be detrimental to the well being of the powerful class in society? Why don’t we remove the children from parents whose thinking violates market principles and market fundamentalism and instead socialized them into conformist zombies? Even though I have a serious concern about this line of thinking I give

him the right to think so. What is of concern to me is the manner in which D'Souza has used an article by Obama Sr. written primarily as a criticism of "Sessional Paper #10" which outlines the post independence government of Kenya's plan for rebuilding after the colonial plunder had officially ended. In the article titled "Problems Facing Our Socialism" Obama senior delivers a scholarly and critical analysis of the plan for post-colonial reconstruction. His main argument is that if the purpose is to develop Kenya in the post-colonial period and there is talk of socialism as a strategy for development, then there are contradictions, conflicting statements, and inaccurate thinking in the proposed approach. In fact his argument is that of a nationalist witness to foreign plunder and control of his country than a hard core socialist of totalitarian variety. It is not anti-colonial thinking alone but nationalistic since they were at the time confronted with colonialism and neocolonialism and not capitalism to warrant socialist strategy. D'Souza accuses Obama senior of advocating state confiscation of private property and raise taxes. He cites the paper "Problems Facing Our Socialism" that "theoretically there is nothing that can stop the government from taxing 100% of income so long as the people get benefits from the government commensurate with their income which is taxed." It is true that the passage sounds odd and irrational at best. But a close reading of the passage suggests that in criticizing the "Session Paper #10", Obama senior questions the logic of the Session paper rather than outlining his idea of socialism. Here is the entire paragraph (Obama, 1965:31); "Theoretically, there is nothing that can stop the government from taxing 100 per cent of income which is taxed. Assuming that development and the achievement of a high per capita is a benefit to society as a whole I do not see why the government cannot tax those who have more and siphon some of these revenues into savings which can be utilized in investments for future development, thereby reducing our reliance on foreign aid." On this basis, D'souza and others have called Obama a socialist and it is interesting that long before Obama hinted at taxing (not heavily) the most affluent Americans, Bill Gates Sr. (Bassett, 2010) and Hines, among wealth Americans either

because they were fearing an implosion or see it as a matter of fairness, called for an increase in taxes for the rich. And today again several of the richest men in America are echoing that concern and calling for taxes on the rich. How about many books on tax fairness by policy wonks, economists etc, are they all socialist. Ralph Nader in his new book “Only the Super Rich Can Save Us,” has introduced the idea that the political class is unable to deal with this issue and therefore, we ought to appeal to the super rich to save the socio-economic and the political structure. Ralph Nader’s “Only the Super Rich Can save us” is a sad commentary on the powerlessness of the political class when confronting the owners of commerce, finance and industry. An elementary understanding of exchange as an implicit capitalistic value, and the ability to feel a fraction of the pain of paying taxes and not receiving much in return, should consider taxation as one side of the equation and social welfare, social safety net, life chances, capital accumulation, savings and investments and growth as the other. Perhaps we (to) need to look at some of the Scandinavian countries which have a high tax rate and also have a very comfortable social service program. After all capitalism is based on exchange and paying taxes must be reciprocated with some real benefits in return. Indeed the American public is shouting fair taxation, and return of social benefits financed by taxation.

In addition to daily blogs, newspaper articles, talk shows (Fox, etc..) the following books are case in point. Here are samples of the books which as the critical reader will notice, there are only two publishers hard at work spinning that which is spin-able. Vadum, Matthew, 2011, Subversion, Inc; O’Leary, Brad, The Audacity of Deceit (2010); Pidgeon, Stephen, 2011 The Obama Error; Dinesh D’Souza, 2010 The Roots of Obama's Rage; Coulter Ann, Demonic; Feddoso, David, 2010. Gangster Government: Barack Obama and...”; Limbaugh, David, (2010), Crimes Against Liberty: An Indictment of President Barack Obama; Blackwell, Kenneth and Kenneth Klukowski, (2010) The Blueprint: Obama's Plan to Subvert the Constitution and....”; Mattera, Jason, (2010) Obama Zombies; Corsey,

Jerome, (2011) *Where's the Birth Certificate?:* and (2008), *The Obama Nation*; Malkin, Michelle (2009), *Culture of Corruption: Obama and....*"; Klein David, and Brenda Elliot (2010), *The Manchurian President: Barack Obama's Ties to Communists, Socialists, and....*"

These diversionary guilds are guilty of diverting the attention from the critical systemic constraints in favor of methodological individualism. The inverse relationship between the level of structural constraints and agency and the expression of moral sentiments in religion, politics and society is a good indication of that diversion. Ultimately the onus is on the masses to decide how much sacrifice they can make. Recently President Obama reiterated this line by encouraging everyone to "...think of shared sacrifice" So we "...can solve the problem of deficit and debt in a week." He was referring to the necessity of fair taxation and that the wealthy should volunteer to pay more taxes. Some have argued that the Republican control of the Congress is responsible, yet even if the President and the Congress were from the same political party, this solution as proposed by the President would have been killed in the committees. It is not simply a matter of will it is a matter of solidified structural contradictions. The inability to resolve these contradictions promotes the symptomatic treatment and the inevitable widening of the class divide. We are noticing that during these difficult time particularly for the working class whose meager sweat equity was stolen, and the ethnic minorities whose hope of a meaning dialogue on race and racism was shattered, and yes, while it is absolutely true that race matters, a class analysis in light of the structural contradictions and imperatives can better guide the discourse and result in concrete humane, socially responsible and an all inclusive approach to the problems of alienation, powerlessness and apathy..

Endnotes:

1. I have discussed this issue in another paper on "socializing the cost of globalization, imperialism and militarism....." (KCKCC e-Journal 2007; Symposia, 2007); "Globalization, Imperialism, Militarism, Social Imperialism and the U.S. National Debt" (Payvand.com, 2007). As it stand, a big portion of the over 14 trillion is the cost of militarism, imperialism and globalization which is socialized and the benefit of which has been privatized.

2. His cabinet is made up of people from the Bush Administration, and the Clinton Administration. Among those who could influence policy direction are Rahm Israel Immanuel, Robert Gates, Dennis Ross, Hilary Clinton, among others. Non-cabinet positions such as Kevin Pollack (a pro-Israel advisor to Obama, and James Steinberg who wrote Obama's speech delivered to AIPAC in June of 2008). In this speech Obama renewed the American covenant with Israel and as if stating his foreign policy for Iran, he singled out Iran (as he does now) as the "greatest" threat to peace. Today as reported mostly by the Israeli media (the American media have no permission to criticize Israel) the defiant Israel continues to dismiss the plea particularly from the Obama Administration to stop settlement building in the occupied territories. Obama's prediction of having a Palestinian state by September 2011, has been of late replaced by the promise of veto should the Palestinians decide to pursue statehood.

3. When President Barack Obama cited cost as a reason to bring troops home from Afghanistan, he referred to a \$1 trillion price tag for America's wars. The final bill will run at least \$3.7 trillion and could reach as high as \$4.4 trillion, according to the research project "Costs of War" by Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. (<http://www.costsofwar.org>)

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