



Mourning Bush

THROUGHOUT THE WORLD radical socialists and those on the left more generally are mourning the passing of George W. Bush. *Criminal irresponsibility* and complacency have never been so perfectly matched as during George Dubya's incumbency. For eight years the left has had little to do but raise the spectre of Bush and his coterie of neo-conservative intellectuals in order to win every argument and denounce every opponent. Bush was the same, if not worse, than Al Qaeda. As in *The Battle for Algiers* the puny explosive efforts of martyrs and insurgents were favourably compared with the death-laden drones and Daisy Cutters of Imperialism whose "collateral damage" knows no limits. For the radical left murders that could be laid squarely at the door of the White House always took priority. Indeed, *all the killings*, in Iraq and elsewhere could be added to Bush's tariff *whoever committed* them because, of course, America had instigated the mayhem in the first place.

John Pilger, the world's mourner-in-chief, was able to lament the 500lb bombs used "to bomb schools and wedding parties" in Afghanistan, without fear of contradiction. Indeed, if anybody were fool enough to disagree with his accounts of massacres, they could look forward to denunciations that placed them squarely in alliance with George W. Bush. Anybody who expressed the smallest doubt concerning the uniquely criminal character of American policy was placed immediately in the camp of those greedy

callous bastards who put oil *before* blood and war *before* peace.

In this Manichean struggle between light and darkness, it was extraordinarily simple to distinguish between good and evil. Consequently, radical cartoonist, Steve Bell, was able to pose as a *James Gillray* for our times. Although lacking the range and sophistication of Gillray's attacks upon *Old Corruption*, Bell could always rely upon grotesque images of Bush and his poodle Blair; he could always count upon George Dubya's diabolical incompetence. Neither subtlety nor humour was required; pointing the finger at the murderer-in-chief was always sufficient.

Now, at the dawn of the post-Bush age things are likely to get fraught; witness Silvio Berlusconi's "joke" about Obama's "tan". What else can you expect from an ally of Northern Leaguers and fascists? This may be so, but Barack Obama's election is likely to present the left with many more difficulties, not least, the untimely dispersal of the *neo-cons* and their *Born Again* cheerleaders. Anti-Americanism embellished with grotesque images of the President and the imbecilic musings of Whitehouse insiders will no longer suffice. The left will have to come up with new twists and turns.

A sense of this necessity is already being expressed on the left. Columnist Martin Kettle couldn't bring himself to welcome Obama's historic victory without reminding his readers: "Whites still voted Republican rather than Democrat on Tuesday". In his article in *The Guardian* Kettle was at pains to demonstrate that it was the shift of Hispanic voters from *right* to *left* what won it. He could not unequivocally welcome the fact that tens of millions of white American's from all classes and regions, many living in the reddest-necked states of the union, voted to put Barack and Michelle, *that frock* and *those kids*, in the White House. These white people, like their black and Hispanic compatriots, could plainly see that Obama has a wiser head than McCain. Consequently,

they broke with historic prejudices in sufficient numbers to get the Democrat elected.

This is a cause for celebration isn't it?

No, not really!

Much further to the left, the *Socialist Worker* could not even bring itself to mention Obama's triumph on its front or its back page, not in a headline, a strap or a box. Not until we get to page 12 do we see a brief mean-spirited editorial in which the lateness of going to press is implied as the reason for the paper's scant coverage of this momentous event. In it we learn that "Obama has already sold out the anti-war movement" and demonstrated his support for US capitalism. Well, of course! Barack Obama was the candidate of the Democratic Party *not* the Socialist Workers Party. It goes without saying that he supports capitalism and will defend what he imagines to be American interests. Obviously, *Socialist Worker* will have to do better than this. In an article *posted online* the day after the election the comrades managed a more positive tone in which they argued that Obama's election has opened up space on the left for grassroots campaigns.

In this they are echoing Naomi Klein and the *Huffington Post*. She thinks that "the remarkable grassroots movement that carried him" into the White House could be mobilized to frustrate the evil designs of the corporate elites. Here are the seeds of a left-wing analysis in which the left will have it both ways: Obama's victory is an expression of popular opposition to "capitalism, poverty, and war" in which "we" played a leading part, which will be wrecked by corporate elites who will ensure that Obama and his aides are kept permanently in thrall to the big money and the big bosses.

In this manner the left will be able to attack the "wilful naivety" of those who expect something good to come from the election of Obama at the same time as they suggest that it opens up new possibilities for the construction of popular anti-capitalist alliances inspired both by the *promise* of Obama's candidature *and* the

inability of his presidency to overcome problems inherent in capitalist relations.

The failure of Obama successfully to tackle any of the major military, economic or social problems confronting America and the world is vitally necessary for the left. Obama must fail if a socialist or more social democratic future is to be built. So we must all refuse to be fooled by the promise of Obama. We must reject such worthless naivety out of hand. Pessimism concerning our prospects *in this world* must go hand in hand with optimism concerning life *in the world to come*.