

Obama Is Not Anyone's Economic Jesus

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, May 26, 2009

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It's time to get over ourselves with thinking of Obama being any kind of economic Jesus. Eric Margolis reflects many people's hopes, but it is time to leave our naivety back in 2008 because its best before date has expired:

["The axis of sleaze between Wall Street and Washington's politicians has to be broken. Time for Obama to drive the money lenders from the temple."](#)

- Eric Margolis, columnist, *Toronto Sun*, April 5, 2009

Margolis' quote shows up on page 2 of the current *CCPA Monitor* journal from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Ed Finn, the editor, juxtaposes it with his own assessment of what Obama will not be able to offer:

"Obama may be helping some of the hardest hit victims of the financial meltdown in the US with his huge stimulus budget, but his massive trillion-dollar bailouts of the fraudulent financial system that precipitated the crisis reflect no desire on his part to replace or even moderately change it. Instead, the obvious intent seems to be to restore and perpetuate it."

- Ed Finn, editor, *CCPA Monitor*, May 2009, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Being optimistic for massive reform to global corporate neoliberal capitalism is one thing, but it truly pains me to acknowledge that expecting Obama to have messianic economic reform powers is just not realistic.

While I cheered his election and have significant respect for his demeanor, honesty, boldness in facing dire economic and social challenges domestically, we need to remember that the vetting process that takes place in the two major US political parties precludes any real reformers from having much of a chance at the White House.

[Dennis Kucinich](#) has been the most progressive Democrat to seek the nomination in recent elections. His policies reflect a profound desire to make America a beacon of social, economic and political justice and advocacy.

He never stands a chance.

And I won't even going into how credible [Ralph Nader](#) is on the corporate autocracy that runs America and the world.

He'll never make the White House either, barring some massive global economic depression and even

more widespread corporate corruption leading to thorough delegitimization of free markets [though the fact that we tolerate this much says little about our civic critical capacities].

So those who have a solid chance of winning big party nominations are able to secure funding from broad sources. And while the stranglehold of corporate control of candidates is diminishing--but by no means disappearing--with more union and citizen financial support of the most progressive of the bunch, America is still America.

American capitalists and the majority of the middle class still believe in the American Dream[tm], or at least the perception that they can buy in one day, despite Marxist arguments about false consciousness. Canadians exhibit much the same tendencies.

We are not so much interested in anyone challenging our beloved capitalism. When "excesses" occur, some tinkering is good enough because in the end, we can trust capitalists; after all, many of us have them as neighbours and they don't seem to kill our pets for sport or empty our car tires on rainy Tuesday nights.

Part of the explanation for this lies in the lack of imagination and discourse about alternative economies. Free market capitalism is only about as old as America itself. That probably explains part of it right there. But before free market capitalism, we weren't pre-social hunter-gatherers. We traded, we had markets, we even used markets to pursue social and economic justice.

And we can do that again, granted we have some leisure time to indulge in [imagining economies that actually serve human beings](#).

But what about Obama, then?

He'll tinker. He'll sound resolute. He'll speak like a disappointed patriarch scolding teenagers who took the car without permission and scratched it at the 7-11. Those capitalists [wag your finger with me, now]: always up to hijinx, so we have to ground them for a week or so to make them reflect on what they did!

He's certainly better than Bush and McCain/Palin, even with McCain having spent most of the decade plugging his nose to suck up to the radical reactionary right of the Republican party to be a presidential contender, ignoring elements of his more moderate core.

But in the end, there is no way that Obama would have been a contender if the American and global corporate oligarchs weren't comfortable that he was not going to close down the World Bank, IMF, WTO and OAS and invite Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales to the White House to build a new economic, social and political vision for the Americas.

And while I'll continue to be pleased with Obama when it's warranted, our relief at the end of the Bush dynasty should not keep us from recognizing when America is just being America some more. They are economic, political, social and cultural imperialists with a now-global manifest destiny that is rarely questioned, though the Chinese economic war with America may ultimately defeat them, leaving merely another global economic monster to contend with.

So feel free to leave your naivety in 2008 and when Obama does something not so progressive, develop a

healthy critique of him. When he buckles to the healthcare lobby over the next few weeks, make sure he knows that Americans deserve to have a better healthcare system than to be stuck at the bottom of OECD rankings.

And if his foreign policy is more engaging and peace-building, celebrate that, but if his diplomacy is twinned with neoliberal assaults on other countries' ability to develop their own economic, social and political structures, take a moment to demand more.

But in the end, if he leaves office without overturning any money lender tables in the temple of the global economy, don't be dismayed. Reality will teach you all you need to know to assess his ultimate political value.