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# Nr 20. May 2010. Contents.

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Date de mise en ligne : Tuesday 23 December 2014

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## Tempest in a Tea Pot: Maintaining Imperialist Relationships and Soft Fascism in the United States

"Scab of a nation driven insane" — this is how Frank Zappa summed up the United States. A "rootless" population

where every attempt to effect progressive change has either been bloodily crushed in retributive retaliation or swamped in a perpetually massive media-driven ideological onslaught. Since the famous license of the frontier was corralled by the 1890s, dissent and aspirations for democratic change have been drowned in engineered insecurity and materialistically induced stupor. In such conditions, popular movements generally emerge founded upon ignorance and confusion.

When we hear, for example, that the current president of the United States is at once a socialist and a fascist we may suspect that ignorance and confusion are responsible for such assertions. Socialism and fascism are historical phenomena that require careful analysis, in part because their various definitions are highly contested. One can only sympathize with the panicked and sincere members of the so-called Tea Party movement, for long-term trends and recent events have called into question many established verities and perceptions in the United States. The mentality of these people is the result of decades of educational abuse. They have been conceptually “dumbed-down” by capitalist marketing and state-driven propaganda. Their predilection for scabbing, prepared in part by forced “Americanization”, has alienated them from any realistic perception of the world including, and perhaps especially, their own society and themselves. But any reassessment of the function of government must avoid the use of reified words whose abstractness only contributes to the fear and confusion they express. Such words are often used cynically because they are so effective in arousing emotional reactions rooted in faulty education.

To gain insight into the present actions and possible historical significance of Mr. Obama’s policies in the present context, a comparison with Franklin Roosevelt’s response to the financial and economic problems the earlier president faced in 1933 is revealing. Today, few informed people believe that Roosevelt was either a socialist or a fascist, although the measures taken by the first and second New Deals were far more “interventionist” and constitutive of permanent state-managed social and economic institutions than anything Obama has suggested or probably even imagined.

The mechanisms of capitalist investment and production in the years preceding the crash of Wall Street in October 1929 and the subsequent economic collapse allowed and, moreover, required Roosevelt’s New Deal program in order to re-establish social stability and confidence in existing economic practices and institutions. By March 1933, when Roosevelt was inaugurated, a large majority of the population understood this. He was opposed by most of the powerful business and financial elites, but he had the support of a population so struck by economic dysfunction that standard ideological appeals vaunting the merits of “free enterprise”, and “reduced government” ceased to have significant emotional resonance.

Obama is in a very different situation. The financial meltdown occurred a few months before he acceded to the presidency. His powerful backers, and now close advisors, are from Wall Street. The economic consequences of the breakdown are still developing, and Mr. Obama does not have the political experience, the personal maturity or the social (read: financial) independence possessed by Franklin Roosevelt in the face of capitalist collapse.

Already we see that Obama relies ultimately on the same mechanisms of fear-induced docility exploited by his predecessors as president. He needs the “war on terror” just as much as they, and no amount of forced optimism will deflect him from maintaining imperialist relationships in the Middle East, Latin American, Africa or elsewhere.

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