

Obama Wins, But the People Can Still Lose

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Global Research, November 08, 2012

Region: [USA](#)

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New York, New York: A year into his presidency, Barack Obama began to plan his reelection bid. Having assessed the lessons of 2008, it was clear that grass roots mobilizations would be essential to assuring a turnout the next time around.

I made a film, on that political campaign, , exploring how local organizers built networks based in part on their candidates' community organizing experience. While most of the media framed the issue as Obama versus McCain, I was more interested in how he planned to win, than regurgitating the campaign's rituals and rhetoric.

From the beginning, the Obamanauts backed the idea of the "ground game" as essential to victory but it was soon enhanced with the latest new media applications—including blogs, facebooking, texting and tweeting.

The field director of that 2008 campaign David Plouffe became the campaign's organizer in chief in 2012. He ran that ground game, the Democrat's antidote to the TV commercial-driven "air war" blitz engineered by Karl Rove and his large list of wealthy right-wing benefactors.

USA today noted, "President Obama and his aides cited a single reason for their re-election success. Turnout. Obama campaign officials said their get-out-the-vote organization - the people who make calls, knock on doors, micro-target potential voters and drive supporters to the polls - was more than three years in the making, building on their record-breaking effort in 2008."

At first, Plouffe was the organizer picked by the candidate who had been an organizer to create a permanent campaign of organizers built on the model he engineered.

Initially, it was a network designed to build a more permanent movement, but soon turned into something else, as lawyer and former Yale Professor David Brown explained last April in a newspaper op-ed:

"It is disappointing that [Organizing for America](#) (OFA) has done so little to retool its successful campaign operation into something more. Much has been said about how from the beginning of Barack Obama's presidential campaign, he mobilized more of a "movement" than a traditional [political campaign](#). But a movement it has not proved to be — and one major reason has been the way Obama and his team have used his supporters since winning the presidency. Instead of encouraging Obama backers to get engaged in community initiatives, this remarkable network of citizens was essentially viewed as a lobbying arm to get top-down legislation moving inside the Beltway."

It was maneuvers like this that lost Obama support with the 18 to 29 year old youth vote

this year. He won 66 percent of it in 2008, but dropped to 59 percent nationally this year

A candidate who had been perceived an outsider was either co-opted or chose to become the ultimate insider even on the symbolic level. Early on, he tried to set himself apart by not conforming to wearing the American flag pin that seems to be part of the American politicians uniform, a contrived emblem of patriotic loyalty. That sartorial choice was soon abandoned

He was soon spending more time with his Wall Street supporters and national security team than progressives. His then chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, now the Mayor of Chicago, showed outspoken contempt for cause-oriented supporters. Activists in the black community like Jesse Jackson were frozen out.

The newly re-elected Obama is now under pressure from Republicans and conservative Democrats to compromise with them in the name of lowering the national debt run up by the Bush wars. Former Bank regulator Bill Black calls such a compromise “the Great Betrayal — the adoption of self-destructive austerity programs and the opening wedge of the effort to unravel the safety net (including Social Security).”

Obama backers spin this idea much more positively arguing their man, will try to strike a “grand bargain” deal before December 31 or risk a worsening recession in the first half of 2013.

The day after the election, the Congressional newspaper, the Hill, indicated there is no appetite for any compromise in the Republican-led but Tea Party dominated House of Representatives.

“House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) informed his Republican colleagues that he will not give ground to Democrats on raising taxes despite President Obama’s victory on Election Day... Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) speaking hours after his caucus made surprising gains to its majority, countered that his side will not relent on extending Bush-era tax rates on wealthier households”

So, despite his victory, Obama returns to an environment of stalemate and confrontation that makes it very unlikely that he can enact his agenda despite his claim that “the best is yet to come.” Writes the Natuonal Journal: “After all that, it turned out to be a big old status-quo election. President Obama wins. The Senate barely budes. The House stays about the same.” The New York Times concludes: “Few if any expect him to seriously change Washington anymore.”

Wall Street seems to have turned on him, while the financial crisis that he inherited has not gotten much better. Many experts say that a President can do little to create more jobs by himself. It’s a “system thing,” not a personal choice. So much for the man who started as the candidate for “change,”

It was only more military spending and some seasonal part time work that recently lowered the unemployment rate, but GOP hostility to any and all stimulus programs insures that the government cannot prime the pump. . That fuels the expectation that the prospects for real change are stuck and/or sinking.

The foreign policy environment doesn’t seem much brighter. Israel’s President Bibi Netanyahu wasted no time to revive his threats to bomb Iran,

So, welcome to term 2 Mr. President, where you will be expected to be more of a magician than a mechanic. What rabbits can you pull out of your hat?

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