

Chosen Leaders, Proven Failures and Political Debacles

James Petras

Introduction

With a few notable exceptions, political leaders are chosen by political leaders, and not by electorates or community-based organizations or popular assemblies. Popular media figures and the so-called 'pundits', including academics and self-declared experts and 'think-tank' analysts reinforce and propagate these choices.

A collection of terms and pseudo concepts are essential in validating what is really an oligarchical process. These concepts are tagged onto whoever is chosen by the elite for electoral candidates or for the seizure of political power. With this framework in mind, we have to critically analyze the symbols and signs used by popular opinion-makers as they promote political elites. We will conclude by posing an alternative to the '*propaganda of choice*', which has so far resulted in broken pre-election promises and political debacles.

Language and Pseudo-Concepts: Subterfuges for Manipulated Choices

The usual suspects in the business of mass-manipulation describe their political leaders in the same folksy or pseudo-serious terms that they attribute to themselves: Experts/ intuitive improvisers/ trial and error 'muddlers'. The 'experts' often mean wrong-headed policymakers and advisers whose decisions usually reflect the demands of their current paymasters. Their stated or unstated

assumptions are rarely questioned and almost never placed in the context of the contemporary power structures. The experts determine the future trajectory for their political choices. In this way, the views expressed by 'experts' are primarily ideological and not some disembodied scholarly entity floating in an indeterminate space and time.

Pundits often promote 'experience' in describing the 'experienced' leader, adviser or cabinet member. They denigrate the opposition candidate adversary as 'lacking experience'. The obvious questions to this platitude should be: 'What kind of experience? What were the political results of this experience? Who did this experience serve?'

We know that Secretaries of Defense William Gates and Donald Rumsfeld and their leading assistants, Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith were appointed to their high positions and praised for their 'experience'. This 'experience' drove the country into repeated disastrous military engagements, political debacles and unending wars. It would be better to reject officials who are highly 'experienced' in creating disasters and appoint those officials experienced in conciliation and reconciliation. Unfortunately the 'experts' never discuss these matters in any historical context.

Many political choices are adorned with 'titles', such as 'successful entrepreneur' and/or 'prize winning journalist'. This ignores the fact that those 'bestowing titles' come from a narrow band of inbred organizations with financial,

military or ideological interests looking for near-future rewards from their now titled, prize winning political choice.

Highly certified candidates, we are told, are those eminently qualified to lead, whether they are university academics with prestigious degrees, or doctors, lawyers, or investors who work for leading groups. The most highly vetted officials coming from Harvard University have implemented economic policies leading to the worst crises in the shortest time in world history.

Lawrence Summers, PhD and Harvard University President-turned Treasury Secretary participated in the pillage of Russia in the 1990's and then brought his talent for sowing international chaos home by joining Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. These two 'experts' promoted enormous financial swindles, which led to the worst economic crash in the US in seven decades.

Money laundering by the big banks flourished under Princeton Summa Cum Laude and US Treasury 'Under-Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence', Stuart Levey. Levey concentrated on implementing brutal economic sanctions against Iran shutting US businesses out of multi-billion-dollar oil deals with Tehran, promoting a huge annual \$4 billion-dollar giveaway to Israel and a granting a uniquely privileged trade status for the Jewish state - which cost the US taxpayers additional billions.

Receiving 'prestigious awards' does not predict a successful policymaker in contemporary US politics. The underlying ideological commitments and political allegiances determine the appointment of these 'prize-winning' leaders. From an

objective perspective, any obscure college economics graduate, eager to increase high tech US exports and sign profitable trade agreements with Iran, would have been far more successful political choice as Secretary of Treasury.

Frequently 'identity' colors the choice of appointees, especially favoring an 'oppressed' minority, even if their field of competence and their political allegiances run counter to the real interests and political needs of the vast majority of American citizens. Some 'ethnic' groups wear their identity on their shirt sleeves as a point of entry into lucrative or influential appointments: "Hello, I'm a Jewish graduate of Yale Law school, which makes me the best choice for an appointment to the Supreme Court ... where there are already three Jews out of the ten Justices... and only an anti-Semite would consider a fourth to be an 'over-representation' of our tiny national minority...whereas the total absence of any WASPs (white Anglo-Protestants) on 'The Court' only confirms their historical degeneracy..." Who could object to that?

'Identity' appointees are not reluctant to employ scare tactics, including citing old historical grievances and claiming special suffering unique to their heritage, to justify their appointment to privileged, lucrative positions. Their identity also seems to insulate them from any fall-out from their policy catastrophes such as disastrous wars and economic crises, as well as providing impunity for their personal involvement in financial mega-swindles.

Race and claims of victimization often serves as a justification for being a political 'chosen one'. We are told repeatedly that some appointee, even with a

tangential link to skin color, must have suffered past indignities and is therefore uniquely qualified to represent the aspirations of an entire group, promising to eliminate all inequality, right injustices and promote peace and prosperity. Racial identity never prevented three of the worst Caribbean tyrants from robbing and torturing their people: The two Haitian dictators, 'Papa Doc' and 'Baby Doc' Duvalier murdered tens of thousands Haitians, especially among mixed race educated elites. Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista had to slaughter hundreds of Afro-Caribbean sugar workers in Santiago de Cuba before he could enter the exclusive 'whites only' Havana Golf and Country Club.

In the United States, it was a 'man of color', General Colin Powell, Secretary of State under President George W. Bush, who bombed and invaded black African Somalia and implemented the policy of invading and destroying Iraq and Afghanistan. The carefully groomed 'First Black President-To-Be' Barack Obama, was the protégé of a Chicago-based millionaire lobby led by the fanatical 'Israel-First' mob, to bring 'identity' to its highest level. This charade culminated in the 'First Black President' and promoter of seven devastating wars against the poorest people of the world receiving the Nobel Peace Prize from the hands of the King of Sweden and a committee composed of mostly white Swedish Christians. Such is the power of identity. It was of little comfort to the hundreds of thousands of Libyans and South Sahara Africans murdered, pillaged, raped and forced to flee in rotting boats to Europe, that the NATO bombs destroying their country had been sent by the 'Historic Black US President and Nobel Peace Prize Winner'. When the wounded captive President Libya Gadhafi, the greatest proponent of Pan-African

integration, was brutalized and slaughtered, was he aware that his tormentors were armed and supported by 'America's First Black President'? A video of Gadhafi's gruesome end became a source of gleeful entertainment for the 'Feminist' US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who would go on to cite her 'victory' over the Libyan President in her bid to become 'The First Female President of the US'.

The question is not about one's race or identity, but whose interests are served by the Afro-American leader in question. US President Barack Obama served Wall Street and the Pentagon, whereas Malcolm X and Martin Luther King had a long and arduous history of leading peoples' movements. MLK joined the striking Afro-American garbage workers in Memphis and the autoworkers in Detroit. Malcolm X organized and spoke for the Harlem community - while inspiring millions.

Gender labels covered the fact that a politically chosen woman ruled on behalf of a family-led tyranny, as in the case of Indira Gandhi in India. The financial lords of the City of London financiers, and the mining and factory bosses in Great Britain chose the very female Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who launched multiple wars abroad and smashed trade unions at home. Madame Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, who promoted seven wars resulting in the deaths, injuries, displacement and rape of 5 million African and Middle Eastern women and destruction of their families, had the unconditional support of the top 20 Wall Street banks when she ran to become the 'First Woman President of the United States'.

In other words, political appointments chosen for their 'gender identity' bring no special qualities or experience that would recommend them as progressive. When political and business elites choose a female for a high political office, they do so because it serves their interests to put a progressive political gloss on their reactionary policies. The 'gender emphasis' is most effective on liberals and the advocates of 'identity over class politics'. In reality it is a vacuous symbol rather than real power and highlights elite upward mobility.

Often media moguls, publicists and corporate leaders laud the 'social background' of a candidate. They use such criteria to groom and coopt upwardly mobile workers, trade union officials and community militants. 'Chosen leaders' from minority or oppressed backgrounds are put in charge of discipline, work-place speed-ups and lay-offs. They sometimes adopt 'workers' language, splicing rough anti-establishment curses with their abuses as they fire workers and cut wages. One's past social background is a far less useful criterion than current social commitments. As Karl Marx long ago noted, the ruling class is not a closed caste: It is always open to co-opting bright and influential new members among upwardly mobile labor leaders and activists.

Labor leaders receive 'special favors', including invitations to political inaugurations and corporate meetings with all the travel and luxury accommodations paid. Elites frequently transform past militant leaders into corporate policemen, ready to identify, exclude and expel any genuine emerging local and shop floor militants. Public and private labor relations experts frequently describe a labor militant's ascent to the elite as an '*up by his own bootstraps*

operation' – putting a virtuous gloss on the 'self-made worker' ready to serve the interests of the corporate elite! The primary feature that characterizes these '*boot-strappers*' is how their sense of 'solidarity' turns upward and forward toward the bosses, and not backward and downward toward the working masses, as they transform into '*boot-lickers*'.

Many examples of these '*upward and forward*'-looking political choices are found among entertainment celebrities, sports heroes, media figures and pop musicians. Rap singers become ghetto millionaires. And 'working-class hero' rock musicians, the well-wrinkled as well as the young, charge hundreds of dollars a seat for their rasping and grasping performances while refusing to play on behalf of striking workers...

The popular music, promoted by the elite, contain country and working class lyrics, sung with phony regional twangs to entertain mass audiences even as the successful performers flaunt their Presidential awards, luxury mansions and limos. The political and corporate elite frequently choose phony working class or ethnic identity celebrities to endorse their products, as the gullible public is encouraged to purchase useless commodities, electronic gadgets and gimmicks, and to support reactionary politicians and politics. There are a few celebrities who protest or maintain real mass solidarity but they are blacklisted, ostracized or past their peak earning power. Most celebrities prefer to shake their backsides, mouth raunchy language, snort or smoke dope and slum a bit with their bodyguards, but the political elite have chosen them to distract and depoliticize the young and discontented. They are paid well for their services.

Conclusion

The concepts, symbols and signs of the ruling class determine who will be the political 'choices' for leaders and officials. Political elites co-opt upwardly mobile 'identities', among minorities and workers, carefully assessing which of their qualities will contribute to the desired elite outcomes. This is how working class and community-based electorates are seduced into voting against their real class, national, community, gender and racial economic interests.

Renegades, demagogues, soothsayers and other charlatans of many races, ethnicities, genders and proclivities run for office and win on that basis.

The elite pay a relatively small fee for procuring the services of prestigious, certified, titled and diversified candidates to elect or appoint as leaders.

Elite power only partially depends on the mass media, money and power. It also needs the services of the concept and language masters, identity promoters and propagandists of the embellished deed.

Stripping away the phony veneer of the 'chosen' politicians requires a forceful critique of the signs and symbols that cloak the real identity of the makers and breakers of these leaders. And it requires that they be exposed for their proven failures and disasters, especially their role in leading America into an unending series of political, military and economic debacles.

