

Just a thought ...

Does Colour Matter?

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By David Berry

And so it has come to pass that the USA has elected its first Black man as the 44th US President. History will judge whether Barack Hussein Obama will deliver on his ambitious programme for change, but I'm not holding my breath. There are a number of important issues of change to be considered in the US context that effectively reflect both national and international concerns. The widespread support in the US reflects both national and international concerns, whilst the enthusiasm for Obama outside the US is based primarily on the hope that US Foreign Policy will radically change. The problem as it currently stands is the enormous attention paid to one man and not the system that Oliver Stone once spoke of which underpins American Capitalism. The issue concerning universal healthcare is a major concern for the American public. During the Presidential campaign it became clear that there was agreement over the need to reform the US healthcare system but there were sharp differences over how to reform or indeed repair it. The Republican Party argued that the 'free market' would boost individual insurance provision by focusing on a system of tax credits which would be available to the individually insured, the non-insured and company sponsored insured workers. In order to pay for this the Republicans proposed taxing insurance premiums (currently excluded from tax) paid by employers to generate the revenue needed to underpin the tax credit system. The Democrats have proposed a very different healthcare scheme in two important and interrelated ways. One is based on actual policy and the second appears to be based on an almost hidden principle. The Democrat policy proposal is based on a dual relationship between private and public insurance where choice between the two are the centrepiece of the policy.



The hidden principle appears to be Obama's desire to create a healthcare system that is based on universal coverage. However, Obama at this time appears to be hedging his bets and rather than prioritise the principle of universal coverage he seems to be prioritising the policy of universal access to private and public insurance cover, which through increased competition and reduction in costs will benefit consumers. All in all the policy, (National Health Insurance Campaign) and they are hoping it works, is there to avoid the more radically intentioned hidden principle of universal coverage and how best to implement it in a country where sections of society and media remain hostile to what many in the US refer to as a 'socialised health care system'. For his part Obama has strongly hinted that if the policy fails to produce universal coverage through universal access to insurance then a rethink on how to achieve this will be necessary. During the Presidential campaign the British National Health Service (NHS) was mentioned on occasions on US television and largely ridiculed for its apparent long queues and inefficiency. Even if that were universally true, which it

isn't, better to have a queue than no medical attention at all because of a lack of medical insurance. The British or even the French healthcare system is viewed as so extreme not to be even on the Democratic agenda and yet Obama will soon confront the realities of how best to achieve a system that secures universal coverage. As Reuters Health and Science Editor Maggie Fox reported (November 5th 2008) with reference to the Brookings Institute, Congress may be less than enthusiastic to financially support Obama's new policy not to mention the hidden principle!

As regards to International Foreign Policies the struggle to implement effective change will be no less intense. The failed war in Iraq (it failed because the US are merely repairing the damage they and the British to a lesser extent caused) will be a significant challenge, not least because it's linked to the Iranian question. Just as important, but almost forgotten, is the US relationship with two other 'outcasts', Cuba and Venezuela. And then there is the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the 'Islamic Problem', the trading block that is China and the Russians warning to place weapons on its soil to counter US based missiles in Eastern Europe to mention just a few.

The media have repeatedly used the word 'historic' to reflect Obama's Presidential victory mainly because of the colour of his skin. Nobody can deny that in a country that has exhibited large amounts of racial hatred, racial segregation and a history of slavery that the election of Obama is significant but 46% did vote for McCain many of whom were white born again Christians. However, this is a marginal issue in the greater scheme of things. Thatcher was the first woman to be elected in the UK and hardly receptive to feminist views, and whilst Obama is no Thatcher he isn't entirely devoid of conservative values either.

There is just one other point to consider. It wasn't that long ago that another black man was elected to power in South Africa: the chief architects of official racial segregation. Like Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela was also swept to power on a tide of enthusiasm, hope and the promise of change, and look what happened there!

Article titled 'Even with mandate, Obama faces health care pain' by Maggie Fox can be located here:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSTRE4A48FC20081105>