



The marathon US Presidential race is drawing into the home stretch, with the finish line to be reached on November 4 2008. By then over \$1000 million will have been spent, mainly on advertising. The field has narrowed down to only two remaining contestants. There are others whose names will appear on the ballot papers, but either John McCain (Republican) or Barack Obama (Democrat) will succeed G. W. Bush to the most powerful office in the world. What changes, if any, can we expect from each of these two men? Let us take them in turn.

John Sidney McCain III, Republican Senator for Arizona, is almost 72 years old, and may become the oldest person ever to ascend to the oval office. He describes his health as excellent but is already battling with cancer, having had several melanomas removed, one of the deadliest of all cancers. Childhood cannot have been easy for McCain, the son of the commander of all US forces in Vietnam. Born at a naval base in Panama, he attended more than 20 schools as he was carted about the world. He was naturally expected to uphold the family tradition, so joined the Navy. He flew fighter-bombers in ground attack missions from aircraft-carriers, but was shot down over Hanoi in 1967 by a SAM missile.

The North Vietnamese were angry with the bomber pilots who rained such terrible suffering upon them from a distance. For six years John McCain felt the force of this hostility, spending two of them in solitary confinement. He claims to have been constantly beaten and tortured, under which he broke down and made many public statements over the radio confessing his war-guilt. When finally released in 1973, the US Navy accepted his explanation, decorated and rehabilitated him. He retired from the Navy in 1981, but with the rank of only Captain.

Moving to Arizona, he remarried to a wealthy heiress and entered politics. Progressing to the elite rank of Senator in 1986, McCain has a rugged, plain-speaking style which wins him many admirers. Unlike virtually all members of the US ruling establishment, whose lives are privileged from start to finish, McCain has had his hands dirty and known real suffering. Nor is he some religious fanatic, like Bush for example. This untypical background has resulted in him being an untypical Republican, with a reputation of a 'maverick'. McCain has voted with the opposition Democrats on many issues, and co-operated with the now critically-ill Senator Teddy Kennedy on immigration reform. He helped put a stop to Donald Rumsfeld's career. He even co-sponsored two bills with Senator Obama (on immigration reform and reduction of greenhouse emissions).

Nevertheless McCain's overall political record is one of a solid supporter of US imperialism, with a particular affinity for war.

He has made eight trips to Iraq, continually calling for more troops and resources to be sent there. His candidature has been endorsed by President Bush, but that gift is a poisoned chalice if ever there was one. President Bush is deeply unpopular at home and abroad, with only 20 per cent of US voters now approving of his presidency. On a personal level, Bush and McCain do not get on, due to bad blood from the 2000 election primaries, when the Bush camp used dirty tricks to destroy McCain's campaign. But on all fundamental political issues the US capitalist class regard McCain as a safe pair of hands, and would therefore like to see him win. Yet he is currently trailing in the opinion polls by six percentage points.

If McCain's background is untypical for a member of the US ruling elite, his only rival, Barack Hussein Obama Jr, is almost one of a kind. Never before has an American of African blood gone as far as he has already done in politics. His uniqueness makes him a mysterious figure to most people. Therefore it

worked at a bank. Her parents were members of the Unitarian Church, by far the most left wing of all Protestant sects. It was nicknamed "the little red church," because of its communist leanings. The school to which they sent their daughter, Mercer Island High School, was a hotbed of pro-Marxist radical teachers. Several of them suffered at the pitiless hands of Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee. Ann Dunham has been described by her friends as a "fellow-traveller", meaning a person who sympathises with Communists.

When her parents moved to Hawaii in 1960, Ann Dunham enrolled at the University to study anthropology, a scientific discipline which she was to work at for the rest of her life, eventually mastering it before her early death from cancer in 1995; she wrote her Ph.D. thesis on *Peasant Blacksmithing in Indonesia*. Such was the woman whom her son Barack has described as "the dominant figure in my formative years...The values she taught me continue to be my touchstone when it comes

University of Hawaii that Ann met Barack Obama Senior in 1960. Barack was a Kenyan of the Luo tribe, and born on the shores of Lake Victoria. The Luos backed the famous communist Oginga Odinga of the Kenyan People's Union. The US Government was then offering scholarships for a few African students "to learn what a wonderful country America is". Barack Sr had been selected for this honour. No evidence has ever been produced that Barack and Ann formally married in Hawaii, but on August 4, 1961 a son was born to them, named for his father.

On the basis of his obvious ability, Barack Sr was selected for a further scholarship, this time to Harvard University, the most prestigious university in the whole country. But Barack Sr had no money with which to take Ann and their little son with them. So he had to leave them behind when he went to Harvard, where he achieved a Masters in Economics. His living expenses were all covered by benefactors like Harry Belafonte.

We are familiar with the "US-trained economists" who go back to their original countries to smoothly facilitate US imperialism. But Barack Sr. was not like that. He had a mind of his own, and a very good one too. Barack went straight back home to help build socialism in Kenya. President Kenyatta was the author of the vague concept of "African Socialism", and in the mid-60s was attempting to carry it through. Barack Sr very rapidly found himself promoted to senior economist at the Ministry of Finance. In 1965 he published his only extant article, but one of extreme interest, entitled *Problems facing our Socialism*, in the East Africa Journal. This document only came to light two months ago. In it, Barack Sr. systematically dismantles "African Socialism", and proves it to be empty of content. He unfavourably contrasts Kenyatta's opportunist concept with what he calls "scientific socialism... communism."

Barack Sr insists that the plan to individualise land ownership is a mistake; communal ownership of land, "one of the best African traditions" should be retained. Rather than independence in name only, it was possible for Kenya to make it real: "to choose to develop by the bootstraps, rather than it become a pawn to some foreign powers such as Sekou Toure did." He dismisses with gentle contempt the Government's claim that there is no such thing as class in Africa. He refutes an assertion that the Kenyan economy was quite different from the one Marx described in his own day, in these terms: " Yet one who has read Marx cannot fail to see that [Kenyan capitalism was what] Marx would have called it finance capitalism, by which a few would control the finances of so many, and through this have not only economic power but political power as well."

Using impeccable logic, he suggests nationalisations and massive taxation of the rich, even possibly 100 per cent. On every page of his essay, Barack Sr makes sensible,

McCain vs Obama

Despite all claims to the contrary, workers are not dupes or fools. Obama has shown an inspiring capacity to heal old wounds between workers across the colour line, rather than aggravate them this is totally new. If gun-crazy America allows him to live, and he can defeat McCain, his first actions as President will be well worth watching. Who knows? We may find that the most important question about Barack Obama Jr is not from what race he comes, but from what class.

is necessary to look unusually closely at his background to solve the enigma of what sort of a man he really is.

to how I go about the world of politics."

It was in the Russian language class of the

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Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, International Co-ordinating Centre, Melbourne -Australia

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