

# Corporate America Speaks: Obama's State of the Union Address

by John Reimann



President Obama and Vice President Biden – Democrats - along with House Speaker Boehner: They're in it together.

*Near the opening of his state of the union speech, and sprinkled throughout it, US President Barack Obama bragged about the increased production of fossil fuels in the United States. In doing so, he labeled himself and the force he represents – Corporate America – as being guilty of crimes against the planet and of posing the greatest threat to future generations that the world has ever known.*

There was, of course, more to it than that. After all, the mainstream of Corporate America (the US capitalist class) put a Democrat in the White House in 2008, and then again in 2012, for a purpose. The main purpose was to oppose the more ideological and less compromising sector of their class, but in such a way as to ensure that that sector's credibility and influence is not destroyed. One important aspect of this is to co-opt and deflect the frustrations, insecurity and anger of US workers. Another, equally important aspect, is to advance the strategic goals of US capitalism globally in such a way as to be minimally disruptive both domestically and globally. This means the use of “diplomacy” - meaning blackmail - before using outright force. (Of course blackmail is not possible if the threat of force is not credible.) Finally, he must try to reinforce a base of support for the main strategic goals of US capitalism as for the system as a whole. Within this broader context, the president must try to reinforce the ability of his or her particular gang of swindlers, liars and thieves (meaning the Democrats or Republicans) to get elected or reelected so that they can continue to loot the government treasuries and obtain bribes from corporations.

What Obama concretely proposed was relatively minor, although significant in its own way. For example, he called for:

- **A new private savings plan called MyRA to further replace pensions.** In an era when there is increasing pressure to privatize social security, this can easily become a step in that direction. And given the increased economic squeeze that most workers are feeling, it will be difficult or impossible for them to put any income aside towards a retirement.
- **“Unemployment reform.”** This has meant such measures as kicking job seekers off of unemployment if they refuse or fail a drug test (as has been done in the state of Michigan). It should be noted that this single step would do more to reverse the decriminalization of marijuana than anything else. Other reforms include steps towards privatization of unemployment benefits, as proposed by Harvard's professor Martin Feldstein.
- **Steps towards raising the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour.** However, this was put in the context of getting the families of full time workers out of poverty. An annual wage of \$20,000 for an individual – never mind a family – is still a poverty wage.

## Common Interests of Capital and Labor

In both domestic and foreign policy, there was a central theme that Obama emphasized: the common interests of all Americans. He did this to ensure that his overall speech did nothing to increase the class consciousness or class anger of the working class, and thereby reassure Corporate America.

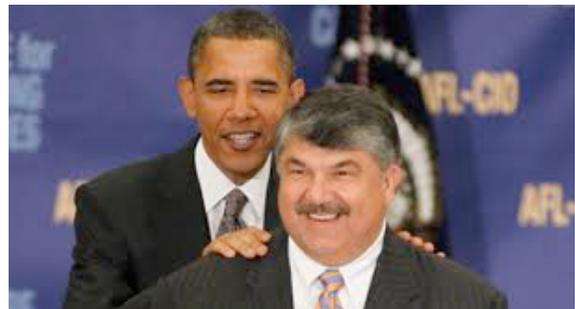
Thus, while he called for a raise in the minimum wage, he also talked about the employers who are voluntarily raising pay out of the (alleged) goodness of their hearts. He claimed that a pay increase (to the princely sum of \$10 per hour) will benefit employers by “boost(ing) their morale.” He made sure that his masters weren't too antagonized by appealing to them, “do what you can to raise your employees' wages.”

He once again supported an education “reform” that includes a “partnership with schools, businesses, and local leaders” - in other words, further privatization of public education.

## “Free” Market and Private Investment

Over and over again, he reasserted the theme that all development depends on the market and privately owned capital. As is usual, this theme includes evoking images of “small business”, and the illusion that private capital can be the main source of jobs. Such as in his appeal to “Let's do more to help the entrepreneurs and small business owners who create most new jobs in America,” he said, for instance. (In fact, the largest single employer in the US by far is the federal government at 2.7 million employees, while total public employment is 4.3 million, and this comes after years of cuts.)

He strongly defended Obamacare, ignoring the millions who will lose their previous health care plans, or lose coverage to see their previous doctors or the fact that Obamacare was developed to forestall a public health insurance system – what is called “single payer.” Ironically, in this regard, the longest applause he received (over a full minute) was for his mention of wounded US military veteran Corey Rensburg, who suffered serious brain damage in Afghanistan. What is ironic is that Obama failed to mention the amazing abilities that the Veterans Administration hospitals have developed to help in the at least partial recovery for those such as Rensburg – ironic because the VA hospitals are the one instance of an example of socialized medicine in the US health care system!



*AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka with Obama. He tweeted from the scene of the crime (Congress) “The way he (Obama) used regular people to make his points was incredible and effective.” It is criminal that he and the rest of the union leadership – from the national down to the local level – refuse to pose an alternative to the politics of big business and capitalism.*

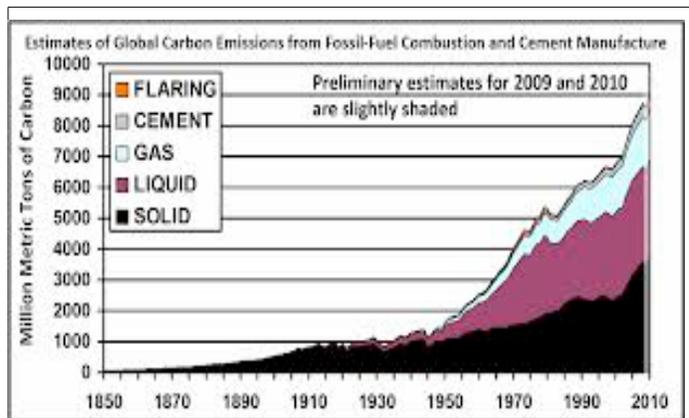
## Global Climate Disruption

**On the all-important issue of the environment and global climate disruption,** he took a swipe at the more extreme wing of the US capitalist class and their representatives such as US Republican Senator Inhofe, when he stated that, “*The debate is settled. Climate change is a fact. And when our children's children look us in the eye and ask if we did all we could to leave them a safer, more stable world, with new sources of energy, I want us to be able to say yes, we did.*” This stands in brutal contradiction to the facts. While they are worried about global climate disruption, the policy of Corporate America and their representative, President Barack Obama, is, as he said “all of the above”, meaning develop every single energy source that is profitable. In practice, this means burning the last drop of fossil fuel – coal, oil and natural gas.

Obama brags that US carbon emissions have decreased, but this is a smokescreen. What matters, the only thing that matters, is *global* emissions, since climate disruption is global. What are the facts on that? According to Scientific American (10/25/2013), “*In 2012, the United States produced oil*

at record levels and is expected to overtake Russia this year as the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas combined, according to the report.... The United States, for example, increased oil production by 13.9 percent last year, its highest recorded increase ever, according to the Worldwatch Institute.”

Obama, on the other hand, bragged about US “energy independence” and supports further development of natural gas as a “bridge fuel.” The fact is that further development of natural gas at best



represents a “bridge to nowhere”; insofar as it is relatively inexpensive, any further investment in its development means a further delay to the transition to safe, clean renewable sources, especially as long as economic investment decisions are determined by profitability.

### Fracking

Obama's support for natural gas development means support for the disastrous method of hydraulic fracturing (fracking), a technique that is also used for exploitation of

shale oil in such deposits as the Bakken deposit (in North Dakota) and the Monterey deposit (in California). This fracking for gas and oil is a disaster for communities at every step of the way – from those such as in Boulder County, CO, who are fighting fracking for natural gas, to those such as in Pittsburg, CA, where a terminal to receive the explosive Bakken crude oil is being proposed.

*By supporting this, Obama and his corporate backers are declaring war on the residents of such communities as well as on the environment worldwide.*

### Foreign Policy

Then there are the issues of foreign policy.

Obama made clear his support for “*Israel – a Jewish state that knows America will always be at their side*” (to which he received sustained applause from the Republicrats). Linked with this is the determination of Corporate America to ensure that Israel remains unchallenged in the region, which is based on the principle that might makes right, and Israel remains the sole nuclear power. In this regard, he balanced the tremendous fear US capitalism has of an outright conflagration in the region due to an all-out war with Iran with the determination to keep Iran as a non-nuclear power.

### Blunting Global Outcry

He responded to the global outcry (including in the US) over the murderous policy of drone warfare by claiming that he is imposing “limits on the use of drones”. In other words, this will continue. As well, he responded to the global outcry over NSA. He will “*reform our surveillance programs because the vital work of our intelligence community depends on public confidence, here and abroad, that the privacy of ordinary people is not being violated,*” he said. In other words, the spying will continue. Meanwhile, entirely credible reports that his administration is considering murdering Eric Snowden have surfaced.

### American Exceptionalism

Obama repeatedly sounded the theme of American exceptionalism – that the US is somehow different. “*My fellow Americans, no other country in the world does what we do. On every issue, the world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might – but because of the ideals we stand for, and the burdens we bear to advance them,*” he said. In part, this is in

justification for violation of even the capitalist-accepted international norms against torture, pre-emptive murders, etc.

Another aspect is to continue to maintain the pretense that US workers have a common interest with Corporate America, and that they just join hands to compete against the workers of the world. In this regard, he bragged about the reverse flow of investment; its coming back into the US. What he neglected mentioning was that this is happening because of the cuts in wages and reduced environmental regulations here. By advancing this concept, Obama and Corporate America are advancing the concept that US workers can only advance at the expense of workers elsewhere, thus undermining the fundamental concept of working class solidarity.

### **Some Things He Didn't Mention**

One item that he and Corporate America prefer to keep away from public consideration is the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). This trade pact will be another major step in freeing global corporations to loot and plunder with almost no governmental controls. The plan is to push it through the Senate with almost no debate.

Domestically, Obama made sure to avoid anything that came close to reminding people of the mass incarceration of black people in the US as well as the indiscriminate brutalization and murder by police of black people, a practice which the police are increasingly carrying out against all people in the US. He also ignored the brutal and inhuman conditions in the US prisons, including the use of psychological torture through isolation and sensory deprivation.

### **Tried and True**

Obama concluded his speech with the tired appeal to “god” to “bless the United States of America.” In so doing, he sought to reinforce the hope that some other world power can save us as well as to reinforce the view that as long as things go well here, it doesn't matter if the rest of the world is starving or being murdered in wars.

Truly, Obama well expressed the views and interests of US capitalism.