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John Naughton's online diary

Coming soon: Obama's first mistake?

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The most satisfactory sight yesterday was that of Dick Cheney, looking for all the world like Dr Strangelove, being wheeled off the scene in a wheelchair. The only problem is that he was then helped into a limousine rather than a police van. Much as I enjoyed Obama's stern denunciation of the Cheney/Rove/Bush perversion of the presidency and their abuse of the Constitution, I had the sinking feeling that he is going to grant the bastards the kind of unconditional pardon that Gerald Ford gave to Richard Nixon. And that would be his first big mistake.

The omens are not promising. Last Sunday he was asked whether he would seek an investigation of possible crimes by the Bush administration. "I don't believe that anybody is above the law," he responded, but "we need to look forward as opposed to looking backwards."

Oh yeah? As Paul Krugman [put it](#) in the *New York Times*:

I'm sorry, but if we don't have an inquest into what happened during the Bush years — and nearly everyone has taken Mr. Obama's remarks to mean that we won't — this means that those who hold power are indeed above the law because they don't face any consequences if they abuse their power.

Let's be clear what we're talking about here. It's not just torture and illegal wiretapping, whose perpetrators claim, however implausibly, that they were patriots acting to defend the nation's security. The fact is that the Bush administration's abuses extended from environmental policy to voting rights. And most of the abuses involved using the power of government to reward political friends and punish political enemies.

Yesterday, Obama swore on Lincoln's bible to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States." And, says Krugman, that's not a conditional oath to be honored only when it's convenient.

"To protect and defend the Constitution, a president must do more than obey the Constitution himself; he must hold those who violate the Constitution accountable. So Mr. Obama should reconsider his apparent decision to let the previous administration get away with crime. Consequences aside, that's not a decision he has the right to make."

Mark Anderson is [even more incensed](#).

Who cares what Obama decides to do about Bush? Excuse me, but I just could not care less. When criminals break the law, we don't ask candidates-to-be if we should prosecute. I would suggest that ANY comments by the Obama team indicating a lack of will to prosecute would, of itself, be worth examining as being in some way accessory.

In other words, Obama: on this subject, please shut up. We are not interested in your first big mistake: not prosecuting the most evil and dangerous villains ever to misuse power in the U.S. government.

Therefore, regardless of the Obama political calculations, we should be resolved, as we have in past similar situations (Iran Contra, Watergate) to put these criminals to trial.

There are so many crimes, it seems almost impossible to list them; I certainly won't try to here, but will leave it to experts in each department and field to do so. Krugman says he has counted six different departments wherein crimes were committed; that seems too small a number, but it does not matter.

Here is a simple question: who is responsible for nearly a million civilian deaths in a faked war? There was never, ever a need for an Iraq war; and that statement will stand the test of history. Given its truth, we should not be talking about the few thousand GI deaths as the cost of the war, but should recognize that the United States, without cause or any particular aggression on Iraq's part, and without any proven concern for its own safety, did cause the deaths of between 600,000 and 1,000,000 civilians in that country.

Let's see now, is Dick Cheney ready to stand up and pay for this? Exactly how, Mr. Cheney, are you planning on doing that?

As Cheney was wheeled away I'm afraid my composure slipped and I uttered a phrase much beloved of my mother (a fanatical catholic): "May he rot in hell". I take that back. I merely want him to rot in gaol.

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