

## "The Mudslide"

The Bush regime is in the middle of a political mudslide, both nationally and internationally. Two almost simultaneous geological mudslides that occurred this month - one in Guatemala and one in Kashmir - have reminded us of how terrible they are. Once they've started, almost nothing can be done to stop them. We can only pick the dead and the survivors out of the devastation afterwards.

For Bush, the warning signals have been there for a while. The occupation of Iraq has been going steadily worse - more lives lost each month, and a political impasse over the constitution however the vote turns out. Popular support in the United States has been sliding downward. The rising cost of gasoline has been noticed by all households, and the rising level of governmental expenditure has been noticed especially by Republican fiscal conservatives. When the hurricanes struck, the incompetence of the Bush regime was there for all to see. Had everything else been going smoothly, political damage might have been marginal. But everything else has not been going smoothly.

Then came the nomination of Harriet Miers for the Supreme Court. Personally, I have no doubt that she is what Bush says she is, someone who shares his own political outlook, and therefore a logical choice for him. But he has stirred up a hornet's nest among his so-called base - the Christian right in the United States. Let us look at why there has been such a negative reaction to her among Bush supporters and why Bush might have nominated her.

The Christian right has always been wary of Bush, never really sure he is one of them. But they have swallowed all their doubts (lately about the Iraq fiasco, the high level of government spending, and the response to the hurricanes) because they wanted one thing out of him above all - the appointment of a Supreme Court justice who would reverse the historic decision on abortion, *Roe v. Wade*. They had bad memories of both Reagan and Bush father, who appointed justices (Kennedy and Souter) who were not ready to reverse *Roe v. Wade*. They wanted a guaranteed choice this time. And there exist no doubt a number of prominent jurists available who would have satisfied this demand.

Bush did not choose any of these jurists. Instead he chose his long-time associate and present-day official counsel to fill the post. Why? There are probably several reasons. Bush knew that appointing any of the list that the Christian right wanted would have led to a filibuster in the Senate. And he was not sure, given his decline in the polls, that he would have won the battle. A defeat in the Senate must have seemed more than he could risk. We'll never know if his calculation about this was right.

The second reason may have been that Bush is worrying about a number of cases to come before the Supreme Court in the next three years that are not about abortion but about his own decisions as the president. And he probably wanted to have a sure vote on those issues, which Miers seemed to offer him (more surely perhaps than any of the anti-abortion jurists the Christian right wanted him to nominate). In addition, the other part of his base - the business community - actually likes Miers, who has had long links with them and is seen by them as reliable on the issues that concern them.

The last reason must surely have been that he thought he'd get away with it vis-à-vis the Christian right, since he thought they would "trust" him. But they don't trust him. They might have trusted him even a year ago, but no longer. It's the mudslide. And of course, the fact that

they are now launching a major campaign against Miers, hoping to force him to withdraw the nominee, just accelerates the mudslide. The 2006 elections are coming up. And the signs are clear. In the states where the Republicans hoped to oust Democratic senators, their "strongest" candidates are declining to run, clearly afraid they would lose. This nervousness now pervades the Republican members of Congress, and makes it ever more difficult for Bush to get anything he wants. The fact that Sen. McCain could get a 90-9 vote in the U.S. Senate on an anti-torture proposal that is implicitly very critical of the Bush administration, and was actively opposed by Bush, is a measure of how weak Bush's position has become within his own party.

Political mudslides are situations in which, no matter what you do, you lose. Had Bush nominated one of the jurists the Christian right wanted, he would have lost. But avoiding that peril, and nominating Harriet Miers, he lost as well. How much devastation this mudslide will cause in U.S. politics we shall soon see. But of course, it will have consequences as well on the U.S. position in the world political arena. The Iraqi constitutional referendum is another lose-lose situation into which Bush has fallen, and it is too late to pull back. More on that, after we have the exact returns.

by Immanuel Wallerstein