



## **BILL'S BACK**

Sunday, August 9, 2009

*Every week CUIP's president Jacqueline Salit and strategist/philosopher Fred Newman watch the political talk shows and discuss them. Here are excerpts from their dialogues compiled on Sunday, August 9, 2009 after watching selections from "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," "Hardball with Chris Matthews," and several Charlie Rose interviews.*

**Salit:** We watched a *NewsHour* segment on Iran about Ahmadinejad's inauguration and the "show trials" in which the opposition leaders are recanting – under duress – their prior positions about the illegitimacy of the elections. Some Iranian experts in the U.S. mocked the regime for insisting that there had been meddling by the West in the protests. And, so the reporting was 'These reformers were forced to say things that they didn't believe. They were forced to say that they were acting as puppets of the West.' There is no dispute that there was duress, including torture. But that seems to be a different issue than the issue of whether the claim by the regime of "outside interference" is credible with the Iranian people.

**Newman:** Well, of course they're under the influence of the West. It seems incredible to say otherwise. That's the world we live in. Things are very interconnected. How could you think that they wouldn't be influenced by the West? Was there anybody in the mix who was actually working for France who was attempting to destabilize the regime? Of course there was. I don't speak much French, but I can tell you there was more than one person. That may even be a good thing, in some respects. In some sense, I agree with some of the right wingers from Stanford, from the Hoover Institute, who said that it's absurd to say that the reformers weren't working with foreign countries and with the influence of the West.

**Salit:** That doesn't make the reform movement illegitimate, though. Whatever illegitimate means.

**Newman:** No, but you have to figure out some level of reliable information for a sensible pragmatic move. Not the "Truth." Truth is out of the question. But pragmatically, what do you do? The person who's best managed to do that, in my opinion, in this whole mess, is President Obama.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** He's done well for us. Even conservatives like Joe Scarborough admit he's done very well for us in foreign policy. Forget about domestically. There, we have to wait and see. But, these kinds of stories are a part of the game.

**Salit:** Well, spin or no spin, it was not that long ago, as in seven months ago, that the policy of our government towards Iran was regime-change. So, the idea that the regime in Iran would be able to say to the Iranian people *What's going on here is about efforts*

*at regime-change that are tied to the West* is not ridiculous. And Obama has to handle that carefully.

**Newman:** It isn't ridiculous, except insofar as the whole thing is ridiculous. I think Obama is whittling away at that. Don't forget, in some ways Obama wasn't elected to solve the domestic crisis. For much of the time that he was running, there wasn't a domestic crisis. He was elected primarily to change our foreign policy. Namely, Iraq.

**Salit:** Yes. So, on to the Clinton hostage release.

**Newman:** Good job, Bill.

**Salit:** Bill goes over, meets with the North Korean leader.

**Newman:** Smiles only when off-camera.

**Salit:** Smiles only off-camera, exactly. And brings the women home.

**Newman:** Exactly.

**Salit:** It was really a good play.

**Newman:** He was the obvious person to go to resolve this.

**Salit:** Apparently the North Koreans thought so. They asked that he come. And that gave me hope that the North Koreans aren't totally off the deep end, living in a world of their own. Clinton was the obvious person because he's a non-governmental figure, but also meta-governmental. Clinton was perfect.

**Newman:** Actually, it had to be somebody who's not a governmental figure, but whose wife is.

**Salit:** So, one of the places that Chris Matthews went off of this was to talk about the relationship between the Clinton wing of the Democratic Party and the Obama wing of the Party. Chris says, 'Well, they're working together. They are basically a coalition.' And then he says, 'And Obama's going to need the Clintons in the coming period.' Why? Because he says one of the things that he's going to need them for is that Obama's support in the white working class is fraying and the Clintons can play an important role in keeping that base in place. Do you agree with that?

**Newman:** Obama and Clinton are both bigger than that. Come on, let's give people a break here once in a while. They see a bigger issue. It's *Destroy the Republican Party when we have this opportunity. We can't miss this opportunity. The Republicans are in serious trouble.* The Clintons and Obama are surely united on that and so they'll help each other.

**Salit:** It's not just about holding on to some votes from Reagan/Hillary Democrats to win an election.

**Newman:** Barack Obama and Bill Clinton are both enormously popular figures in this country and around the world.

**Salit:** Right.

**Newman:** So, it's more a question of their having recognized that there is a basis for working together, not to resolve all their disputes, but to work together for some common interest. I think that common interest is best labeled as "Destroy the Republican Party." And surely burying the force that has steered the GOP for a generation, namely right wing conservatism.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** They're both interested in that. And so, they can talk to each other. They don't have to agree on everything. If there was an election tomorrow and Hillary was running, they'd go right back to tearing each other down. They know how to play this game well. They're both very good at that, in different ways. I think Obama is the best thing that could have happened to Bill Clinton in terms of Clinton's legacy.

**Salit:** How do you see that?

**Newman:** Well, because Clinton has an opportunity under this kind of administration to breathe again, to be able to come out and do stuff. He wasn't going to be able to do that under a more establishment White House.

**Salit:** Ironically, if Hillary had won, his hands might have been tied even further.

**Newman:** Maybe. But he wasn't going to play any role internationally. But, Obama gets in and one of the first moves he makes is to put Hillary in as Secretary of State. And that's what takes care of the whole thing. Now the doors are open again, and Bill is in.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** The doors are open for Clinton to come in, not as top banana, but as an ex-president. So, he's in the game. And that's good because he's a good player. At some things, he's extraordinary. Indeed, Obama (this is overstated) is so clean, that he even cleaned up Clinton. It reminds me of the Boy Scout pledge which enumerates the qualities of a scout, ending with "brave, clean and reverent." Obama's cleanliness is extraordinary.

**Salit:** It permeates all who travel in his wake.

**Newman:** Right.

**Salit:** There's been talk about the Clinton/Gore tension and how this event brought them back together again.

**Newman:** It was Obama who brought them back together again.

**Salit:** OK.

**Newman:** Gore is into a lot of stuff that Obama wants to embrace.

**Salit:** Obama's healing the Democratic Party.

**Newman:** Absolutely.

**Salit:** And what's the relationship, do you think, between being able to heal the Democratic Party and being able to destroy the Republican Party?

**Newman:** I almost don't know how to answer that because it seems, in a way, so obvious.

**Salit:** Can't do with one without the other?

**Newman:** I don't know if I'd quite go that far. But I do think that there are some in the Democratic Party who think that this is a big moment for the Democrats to make hay. Arguably, they will want to work together to do that.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** I think the problem, insofar as the Democrats have a problem with this, is the independent movement. Because a probable prerequisite for the independent movement to come in as the second force, is that you have to do away with the existing second force, namely the Republican Party.

**Salit:** So the Democrats find themselves in a position where meeting their own goals helps us to grow.

**Newman:** Yes. And, in some ways, as you know better than almost anybody in the country, it's the basis for getting along, in a tactical sense, with the Democrats.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** I think that's the fight of the future and it's a good fight, a healthy fight. And I don't think it involves targeting all Republicans. There is a fight going on inside the Republican Party between the neo-conservatives (who some call neo-fascists) who came very, very close to taking over the Republican Party, and the moderates. The neo-cons are not completely out of power even now.

**Salit:** Not at all.

**Newman:** They're still there. As Joe Scarborough points out.

**Salit:** So, the question of the future is, does a nationally significant coalition between the Democrats and the independent movement emerge and sideline the Republicans and most particularly, Republican conservatism?

**Newman:** I think so. That's the overall picture. You know, there are blips and movement this way and that way. But I think that's the relatively long-term political landscape.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** And I think the most astute Democrats are well aware of that and recognize that they have to work to secure their relationship with the independent movement because they're so dependent on it. I think Obama completely understands that. The Clintons are a little slow on that one. But they got hurt badly off of being slow, witness Obama's nomination. But, Bill is a consummate political pragmatist, so even he may come around. But Obama is way ahead of Clinton on this one.

**Salit:** Yes.

**Newman:** That got him to the presidency of the United States.

**Salit:** Yes, it did. Thanks, Fred.

**Newman:** You're welcome.