



ORGANIZING

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ORGANIZING *for* SOCIALISM

Housed at the Democratic National Committee, the sycophantic OFA is doing everything it can to milk the cult of personality Barack Obama created during the 2008 campaign. Is it really political activism—or a massive ego trip?

by Matthew Vadum

Liberals responded with howls of indignation when Rudy Giuliani mocked community organizers at last year's Republican National Convention.

The former mayor of New York City said that Barack Obama "worked as a community organizer."

"What?" Giuliani said as he burst out laughing. Speaking over a boisterous crowd, he continued, "He worked—I said—I said—OK, OK. Maybe this is the first problem on the resume. He worked as a community organizer."

GOP vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, former mayor of tiny Wasilla, Alaska, also got laughs when she belittled Obama's work with ACORN and other radical groups. "I guess a small-town mayor is sort of like a 'community organizer,' except that you have actual responsibilities," Palin quipped.

Conservatives roared approval, but

now the Left is aiming to have the last laugh.

Conservatives are justifiably suspicious of Obama-style community organizing, so it's no surprise that Organizing for America (OFA) is the kind of organization that makes those on the Right uneasy.

Prior to last year, most Americans had never heard of community organizing.

But what exactly *is* community organizing?

In the specific sense the Community Organizer-in-Chief uses the term, it's not about church bake sales, picking up litter, little leagues or parent-teacher associations.

Obama-style community organizing is pure leftist, anti-capitalist agitation. It's about that nebulous Marxist concept of "social justice." It's about making people angry so they push for change. It artificially creates pressure

for government spending on whatever project is fashionable in leftist circles that day.

MAKING SOCIALISM COOL

OFA attempts to make progressive agitation hip and mainstream.

OFA tries to cross Howard Dean-style activism with community organizing. It seeks to improve on the Internet-based success of Dean's insurgent 2004 presidential campaign that propelled the then-unknown governor from a sparsely populated state to frontrunner at the beginning of that year's Democratic primary season.

OFA, which, as a child of the president's 2008 campaign, adapted its name from Obama for America, is headed by Mitch Stewart, who was an official in the Obama campaign. Before that, he was the coordinated campaign manager for the Democratic Farm Labor

for AMERICA

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Party in Minnesota in 2006, when Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D, won her race. In 2004, he was field director for Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., and regional field director in Iowa for former Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., during his presidential run the same year.

OFA is “more than a spinoff of Mr. Obama’s presidential campaign—it’s housed at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) but is free to let the Party do the political dirty work, and it keeps his enthusiastic supporters engaged, active and primed for his re-election bid,” according to a recent *Washington Times* article.

The White House may not legally use the 13 million e-mail addresses compiled during last year’s campaign, so Obama created OFA so he could continue to proselytize between elections.

Obama’s 2008 campaign was “the most technology-savvy political operation in American history,” writes Jose Antonio Vargas, the Huffington Post’s technology editor.

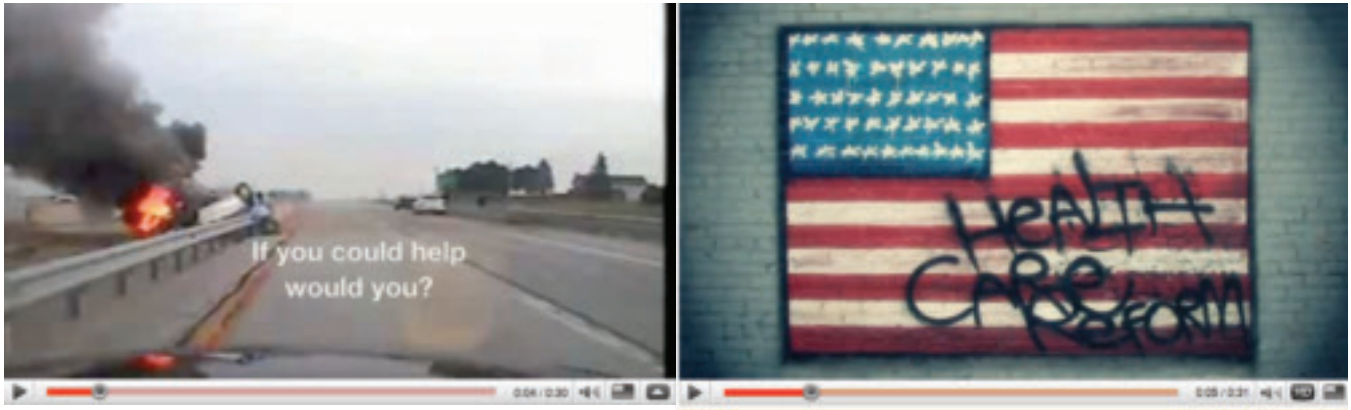
Those millions of e-mail addresses represent “supporters who not just financially supported Obama’s candidacy but also collectively clocked hundreds of hours in volunteer time to help elect him president: knocking on doors, making phone calls, spreading the word around within their own online social networks,” he wrote.

Obama’s campaign backers didn’t merely give money, Vargas noted. “They gave money and worked for Obama for free.”

Dean, who served four years as DNC chairman after his unsuccessful presidential bid, said for a long time he pushed his party to embrace the idea of a “permanent campaign.”

“We now have one, and you have to have that in order to win,” Dean said, adding he’s a “big fan” of OFA.

OFA claims to replicate the work of



These screenshots from ads entered in the OFA "Health Reform Video Challenge" are two of 20 finalists that site visitors can vote on (YouTube.com)

community organizers on a national scale, which is difficult to do because community organizing is *by definition* local. In theory, it's supposed to involve participatory democracy, too. It's not supposed to be dictated down to local communities from on high by the DNC.

Labor organizer turned Harvard academic Marshall Ganz, who trained state organizers for the Obama campaign, agrees the OFA model is flawed. "It's much more an instrument of mobilizing the bottom to serve the top than organizing the bottom to participate in shaping the direction of the top," he told the liberal *New Republic*.

Whatever you want to call OFA's activism, it relies heavily on the Internet and frequently draws upon the successful model of meet-up activism and point-and-click fundraising developed by MoveOn.org. That group, which helps to keep the Democratic Party tilting to port, was created in 1998 as an effort to build grassroots opposition to the Republican effort to impeach President Clinton. Today, the campaigns waged by OFA and MoveOn.org often overlap. Sometimes similar mass e-mails from both groups will arrive in members' e-mail boxes within minutes of each other.

In the fall, OFA copied a publicity-grabbing formula from MoveOn.org by creating a contest to produce a 30-second TV ad arguing for government-run health care.

One ad entered in the "Health Reform Video Challenge" shows an overturned car burning on a highway, a woman drowning and a raging fire, and asks the viewer if he would help the people shown if given the opportunity. Referring to a bogus study by socialized-medicine

supporters, it displays this text: "You could save 44,000 Americans each year who die because they have no health care. Support a public option."

Judges for the contest included Obama campaign manager David Plouffe, and actors Rosario Dawson, Kate Walsh and John Cho. Perhaps Cho, who played "Harold" in the hit movie "Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle" was recommended by Kal Penn, a White House outreach official who played alongside him as "Kumar."

A "project" of the Democratic National Committee, Organizing for America's very name is disconcerting to conservatives because it evokes images of the radical left-wing father of community organizing, Saul Alinsky. A Marxist Machiavelli, Alinsky dedicated his classic activism manual, "Rules for Radicals," to Lucifer, whom he called the "first radical known to man." The purpose of the book was to help activists take power from the "haves" and redistribute it to the "have-nots."

Alinsky, a Chicagoan who elevated local-level political agitation to an art form, was a significant influence on Obama, who, like Alinsky, cut his teeth organizing in the Windy City. Alinsky believed in "rubbing raw the sores of discontent." He prescribed the tactics and defined the goals of community organizing. Among his "rules": "Keep the pressure on. Never let up" and "Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it and polarize it."

One OFA program might well have sprung from the mind of Obama's close personal friend Bill Ayers, the unrepentant terrorist turned education professor.

OFA recruits college students to "build support for President Obama's agenda" and earn college credit while advocating for "change," World Net Daily reported.

"By becoming a National Organizing Intern, you'll be part of the grassroots effort to make the change we fought for a reality in 2009 and beyond," said an OFA notice posted on social-networking websites. "You'll learn core organizing principles that are crucial for any campaign and play an important role in building our organization in your state."

The notice continues: "President Obama describes his time as a community organizer by saying: 'It was the best education I ever had, because I learned in those neighborhoods that when ordinary people come together, they can achieve extraordinary things.' This is your chance to get that same education."

"If you're passionate about making sure every American has quality health care, reviving our economy, and building a clean energy future, don't miss this great opportunity. No previous experience is needed in order to apply."

SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Organizing for America exists to relentlessly press for change.

"The advantage of Organizing for America is that it can be devoted exclusively to a particular issue, 100 million percent," said DNC communications director Brad Woodhouse.

The *New Republic* describes OFA as "an Internet version of the top-down political machines built by Richard Daley in Chicago or Boss Tweed in New York. The difference (other than technology)



was that this new machine would rely on ideological loyalty, not patronage.”

When Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize, he blasted out a mass e-mailing through OFA that served notice he would use the surprise award to push his extreme agenda.

After acknowledging he didn't deserve the prize, Obama announced he would nonetheless “accept this award as a call to action.” He said the prize “has not just been used to honor specific achievement; it's also been used as a means to give momentum to a set of causes.”

DNC spokesman Hari Sevugan said the largely unregulated OFA's primary purpose was “to advance the president's agenda, but when there are good candidates that can advance a community and support his agenda, we work for them.”

OFA pushes the president's legislative agenda but has also dabbled in state politics. In March, it got involved in a race in New York's 20th District and, this fall, it got involved in the Virginia gubernatorial contest.

Organizing for America has no independent legal status outside the DNC. And DNC financial filings suggest little about its structure and day-to-day operations. Spending on the project is not separately accounted for in public disclosures, so its actual scope is difficult to determine.

OFA likes it that way.

OFA does not seem to have helped Democrats raise money—at least not yet— but that doesn't appear to be one of the group's goals. As of Oct. 26, the DNC raised \$61.8 million for the 2010 election cycle, which is below the \$68.8 million the Republican National Committee raised in the same period, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

As a permanent campaign, OFA is indistinguishable from the presidential election campaign that Barack Obama ran in 2008. It buttresses and reinforces everything Obama does, echoing him, lionizing him and pushing his legislative agenda.

“We've never had a political leader who has continued their organizing while in office like this at this scale,” former Washington director of MoveOn.org Tom Matzzie said in January.

Some say the group has a cultish feel to it, a sentiment that has only

grown more widespread since it was revealed in the summer that the Obama White House tried to use the National Endowment for the Arts to generate art supportive of the president's policy objectives.

Of course, every administration is filled with starry-eyed true believers who think their president is the best ever, but there seem to be so many more fanatics in the Obama administration.

“It's kind of eerie,” said David Norcross, chairman of the Republican National Lawyers Association, of OFA. “It's creepy.”

“It's not a permanent political apparatus. It's a permanent personal apparatus built around one man, meant to reinforce his cult of personality. It has precious little to do with Democrats.”

The OFA Web site's web address seems to reinforce Norcross' sentiment: www.BarackObama.com, which was the address of the presidential campaign Web site.

“If I were a Democrat, I would be concerned about this,” said Norcross. “With both Bushes, Clinton, Reagan, it was about the party. This is about Obama. And what happens after him? Is this an attempt to put together a movement very different from the Democratic Party and to take it over and to supplant it?”

Whatever it is, most Democrats don't seem too concerned about it.

An OFA employee told me there's never been any intention of making the group a permanent component of the Democratic Party. “We haven't thought it through that far. The goal right now is to promote President Obama's agenda.”

Contradicting Howard Dean, he said OFA is “not a campaign apparatus; it's a continuation of the grassroots effort.” The group currently has staff in 48 states and plans to have staff in place in all 50 states by the end of the year, he said.

A different Democratic source told the *Washington Times* that as OFA was being created some Democratic officials worried it would attack the more moderate Democratic lawmakers.

Those concerns were well-founded. This past summer, OFA marshaled its considerable resources against fellow Democrats. The group ran health care ads in eight Republican-leaning battleground states in order to press wavering Democrats to support the Obama health care nationalization agenda.

ONLINE HEALTH CARE ACTIVISM

The pages of the OFA Web site's blogs read like a fawning “fanzine,” complete with beautiful, large, high-resolution photos of President Obama and a smiling First Family. Essentially it's *Vanity Fair* in digital form. Some blog posts delve into substantive policy issues; others show the president looking commanding, poised and even heroic.





As tea party mania spread across the nation in August, OFA decided it needed to fight back in order to save ObamaCare from the fate HillaryCare suffered under President Clinton.

OFA hosted an online forum with Obama billed as an opportunity to “update supporters on the fight to pass real health insurance reform.” This Internet-based pep rally featured outgoing Virginia Gov. and current DNC Chairman Tim Kaine and Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla.

Viewers were advised that, since June 6, OFA volunteers had organized massive grassroots support for health care reform. The group claimed more than 1.5 million OFA members took action organizing 11,906 local events and making 64,912 local congressional office visits in one week, and bragged that its members had outnumbered protesters at town hall meetings.

During the online event, Obama used typical class-warfare rhetoric and attacked the previous administration: “We’re here because you believed that after an era of selfishness and greed, that we could reclaim a sense of responsibility and a sense that we have obligations to each other not just here in Washington but all across the country. You believed that instead of growing inequality, we could restore a sense of fairness and balance to our economic life and create lasting growth and prosperity. You believed that at a time of war and turmoil, we could stand strong against our enemies, but also stand firmly for our ideals and reach out to the rest of the world and describe to them what America is about and how we can forge together a world of common interests and common concerns.”

Around the same time, OFA tried a similarly hard-edged approach, lashing out at opponents. The group did a mass e-mailing to its supporters asking them to call their U.S. senators on Sept. 11, now known as Patriot Day in honor of those killed in the terrorist attacks eight years ago.

The OFA message included this inflammatory statement: “All 50 States are coordinating in this—as we fight back against our own Right-Wing Domestic Terrorists who are subverting the American Democratic Process, whipped to a frenzy by their Fox Propaganda



A volunteer at Democratic National Headquarters sits beside boxes from all 50 states containing 642,000 signed pledges of support for ObamaCare, which were delivered to elected officials on Capitol Hill according to Organizing for America (OFA) who coordinated the event. (Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

Network ceaselessly re-seizing power for their treacherous leaders.”

The Heritage Foundation’s Rory Cooper was incensed. “Many Americans took off work and sacrificed family time this past August to attend congressional town halls, where they voiced opposition to a government-run overhaul of their personal health care choices,” Cooper wrote.

Those town hall participants hand-painted signs, picked up their children and drove to their local church or school gymnasium “for valuable lessons in community organizing and democracy,” he wrote. For their civic engagement “they were called names, labeled as ‘too organized’ or ‘un-American,’ and likened to mobs, Nazis and Fascists. And now President Obama’s team has designated Sept. 11 as the day to liken conservatives to al Qaeda terrorists.”

OFA tried to keep up the pressure in the fall. President Obama used OFA for a mass fund-raising e-mail barely an hour after health care legislation won narrow House approval in November. “The final Senate bill hasn’t even been released yet, but the insurance companies are already pressing hard for a filibuster to bury it,” Obama wrote.

In what seems to be a case of psychological projection, the machine politician from Chicago warned that

the “insider lobbyists and partisan operatives” are “desperate” after their “old formula of scare tactics, D.C. back-scratching and special-interest money” failed to stop the measure in the House.

FIGHTING THE ACORN ‘SMEAR’

OFA continues trying to cover up the connection between President Obama and the most famous of community organizing groups, the radical Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN).

On its “Fight the Smears” Web site, the campaign last year published a lengthy, untruthful, unconvincing, purported refutation of Obama’s history with the advocacy group. Although anyone with access to the Internet could have found proof of Obama’s ties to ACORN in seconds, as more evidence surfaced, Obama’s webmasters repeatedly fine-tuned the words on the “ACORN rumor” page to reflect the rapidly changing evidentiary environment.

Reflecting the continuing interest the Left has in obscuring the president’s history with ACORN, “Fight the Smears” has been incorporated into OFA’s site.

Interest in Obama’s connection to ACORN reached a low ebb last summer, but that was before videos of the undercover prostitution sting



Barbara Malatesta, foreground, reads some health care reform literature as she and others wait for the start of a training session regarding health care reform given by Organizing for America, to dispel common “myths” surrounding ObamaCare. (AP/Tina Fineberg)

engineered by conservative activists James O’Keefe and Hannah Giles surfaced on the “Glenn Beck Program” and on BigGovernment.com.

The videos shocked Americans and led the IRS and Census Bureau to sever ties with ACORN.

During the 2008 campaign, as ACORN voter-registration issues flared up, Team Obama was desperate to distance itself from the candidate’s previous employment with ACORN affiliate Project Vote.

Obama’s ties to ACORN go back to at least 1992 when he directed voter registration efforts for Project Vote. The push helped elect Sen. Carol Moseley Braun, D-Ill., who went on to be plagued by serious corruption allegations throughout her single term in the Senate. Obama also helped train ACORN leaders and represented ACORN in court.

The campaign got lucky when most of the media—led by the agenda-setting *New York Times*—responded with a deafening silence to news of Obama’s involvement with America’s most infamous activist network.

During the election cycle, it was already known that, at an ACORN-sponsored forum in late 2007, Obama vowed he would meet with ACORN and other members of the radical advocacy community in his first 100 days as U.S. president. He said: “Before I

even get inaugurated, during the transition, we’re going to be calling all of you in to help us shape the agenda. We’re going to be having meetings all across the country with community organizations so that you have input into the agenda for the next presidency of the United States of America.”

The month before, Obama said: “I’ve been fighting alongside ACORN on issues you care about my entire career. Even before I was an elected official, when I ran Project Vote voter registration drives in Illinois, ACORN was smack dab in the middle of it, and we appreciate your work.”

And during the primaries, the late blogger Nancy Armstrong discovered the campaign paid \$832,598 to Citizens Services Inc., an ACORN affiliate, for get-out-the-vote activities. The expenditures were originally listed in campaign finance filings as “staging, sound and lighting,” but when the campaign was caught lying, it quickly issued a “correction” acknowledging the money went to get-out-the-vote efforts during primary season.

Although the media had been interested, albeit briefly, in the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the preacher whose fiery anti-American sermons Obama willfully attended for decades, reporters showed little interest in investigating the candidate’s ties to ACORN. Despite ACORN’s track record for crime and corruption, journalists offered a

collective yawn about the group.

But candidate Obama decided to take no chances and went all out in an effort to deny his association with ACORN. The campaign went to the political equivalent of DEFCON-1, treating the entirely factual accusation that Obama had worked for the politically radioactive ACORN as blasphemy.

That effort went into high gear beginning in September 2008 when ACORN began to receive a mountain of bad publicity relating to nationwide allegations of election fraud. Obama supporters tried to confuse the issue by saying the senator was never an ACORN community organizer. They argued that Project Vote, the voter registration drive that Obama ran in 1992, was never a part of ACORN.

Aided by the liberal Huffington Post and its George Soros-backed allies at the propaganda factory Media Matters for America, Project Vote engaged in legalistic hairsplitting, conveniently claiming it didn’t become closely aligned with ACORN until Obama left. Incredibly, reporters generally took Project Vote at its word.

They shouldn’t have. ACORN is well known for its never-ending reliance on of the “plausible deniability” argument. Its unusual mafia-like organizational structure allows it to take credit when a member of the ACORN family does something commendable and to distance itself when the affiliate runs into trouble or when the political environment requires it. Organizing for America seems to have stayed out of legal trouble—so far.

OFA used e-mail to urge its members to call voters in New York’s 23rd District in November to remind them to vote. Members were asked to click on a link to an “online tool” that showed the names and telephone numbers of 25 voters and offered a script for the call.

The *Washington Examiner’s* Mark Hemingway criticized the “careless” get-out-the-vote operation, arguing it opened the door to spammers and criminals whom OFA would have difficulty tracking down after the fact. “By the end of the process, total strangers with the imprimatur of calling on behalf of an organization founded by the president will be privy to the name, phone number, e-mail, age and gender of 25 voters in New York,” he wrote.



CRITICISM

David Wasserman of the *Cook Political Report* said he didn't share the view of some that OFA is a political operation unprecedented in American politics. "The operation is essentially designed to keep Democratic enthusiasm percolating while Obama tries to rise above the fray to pass an agenda," Wasserman told me. "I think what's historic is that Obama compiled 13 million e-mail addresses. Bush was able to compile millions of e-mails as well, and those e-mail addresses were useful to Republicans politically."

And Michael Barone, senior political analyst at the *Washington Examiner* and co-author of the "Almanac of American Politics," didn't seem impressed by OFA. "What strikes me as fascinating is the lack of energy and enthusiasm that I perceive from this group and the vivid contrast from what you saw in the Obama campaign in 2008 and the way that they were able to gin up all this support, enthusiasm of people around the country," Barone said in an interview.

"They don't seem to be nearly matching the spontaneous enthusiasm of the tea party groups of these angry people at town hall meetings," said Barone.

If he's right, this could bode ill for Obama's agenda.

"One blogger recently noted that [sale of] Obama memorabilia, the coffee mugs with his picture on it and tea towels or whatever else people were selling, is way down and it strikes me that for many of his supporters perhaps the great achievement was installing America's first black president, a man who gave lip service to a lot of left-think and called it traditional Americana and who removed the 'evil' Texan George W. Bush from the scene," Barone noted.

"And having done that, they're resting content," he said. •

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THE TOWNHALL ON...

Obama's Perpetual Campaign

"In what may have been the first instance of an American government officially calling on one group of American citizens to protest against, 'get in [the] faces' of and shout down another group of their own countrymen, President Obama authorized his campaign arms, the DNC and Organizing for America, to call opponents of his health overhaul plan a 'dangerous mob' and to encourage supporters to counter (violently, if necessary) reasonable demonstrations and to put a stop to their questioning of elected officials."

Erick Erickson
Red State

"Organizing for America, Team Obama & the DNC's perpetual campaign arm, is holding a health reform video contest. They've chosen 20 finalists. Continuing the human stage-prop theme plied by the White House over the past year ..., many of the video finalists use children to shill for ObamaCare ... the next generation of government entitlement-seekers declaring 'I deserve health care.'"

Michelle Malkin
MichelleMalkin.com

"It's interesting to see the president's political machine [in a mass e-mail] calling on his supporters to use their Constitutional right to free speech when the White House spent the last week criticizing others for doing the exact same thing.... After the 'astroturfing' rhetoric from the Democrats [about health care protesters], it's hard to ignore the hypocrisy in this mass e-mail."

Brian Walsh
National Republican
Senatorial Committee

