

# Opinion & Analysis

## Obama faces threat from vested interests



### JOHN GIBBONS

The controversy over Obama's healthcare reforms is a prelude to an even dirtier battle over climate change

**Y**ESTERDAY, PRECISELY 75 years ago, Germans voted overwhelmingly in a plebiscite to support Adolf Hitler's elevation to the new position of Führer, or absolute leader. The fateful date was August 19th, 1934. Not everyone was alarmed. *Fortune* magazine was positively gushing about the "ancient virtues" of the new wave of fascism sweeping Europe.

Three days after Hitler's putsch, another potentially fateful moment in history was playing out in a hotel in Philadelphia.

One of the US army's most decorated officers, retired Gen Smedley Butler, had been summoned to a secret meeting. A group of businessmen, dismayed by president Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal and emboldened by the success of European fascists, were plotting a coup, which they asked Butler to front.

Their plot had one gaping flaw: Butler despised plutocrats. Two years earlier, he had given a frank account of the realities of his career as a marine general: "I spent 33 years being a high-class muscle for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism . . . I might have given Al Capone a few hints."

The scheming was exposed. "If Gen Butler had not been the patriot he was . . . the plot

certainly might very well have succeeded, having in mind the conditions existing at that time," recalled John McCormack, chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

"The plotters hated the New Deal because it was for the people, not for the moneyed interests, and they were willing to spend a lot of their money to dump Mr Roosevelt out of the White House," said McCormack.

Just what would today's plutocrats pay to run President Barack Obama from office? It's hardly an idle question. The avalanche of smears and innuendos that was a feature of the latter days of last year's presidential race has started up again in earnest.

These include the "birthers" campaign, a racially motivated slur that Obama is not really American. Next, his efforts at reforming its bloated, inequitable healthcare have been viciously misrepresented.

Republican Sarah Palin came out with this epic slander: "My parents or my baby with Down syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's 'death panel' so his bureaucrats can decide, based on . . . their 'level of productivity in society', whether they are worthy of health care."

Egregious lies are endlessly regurgitated on right-wing talk radio and television. These media form a festering malignancy which

oozes intolerance, science ignorance and bigotry into every facet of American public life.

According to Fox News host, Glenn Beck, global warming is "the greatest scam in history", while president Obama "is a racist . . . with a deep-seated hatred for white people". Right-wing radio broadcaster Rush Limbaugh last week compared Obama to Adolf Hitler.

"By tolerating and encouraging Limbaugh, the Republican leadership is fomenting racial and ethnic hatred that could have disastrous consequences for our country," wrote Menachem Rosensaft, a US law professor and descendant of Holocaust survivors.

In a land almost completely plumbed into television, Fox News is US journalism's open sewer, contaminating public debate and providing an echo chamber for patent falsehoods, such as Palin's "death panel" smear. As Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels noted: "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."

The fate of Obama's attempt to deliver healthcare reforms hangs in the balance. This is now seen as a skirmish for the even dirtier battle that is raging over climate change. Democratic Congressmen

have recently been showered with forged letters generated by lobbyists but purporting to be from Hispanic and civil rights groups opposed to climate legislation.

Meanwhile, the American Petroleum Institute is bankrolling what it calls "energy citizen" rallies in 20 states.

Its leaked plan is crude but effective: get companies to pack public meetings with their own employees and make it look like spontaneous public opposition to climate legislation.

Seventy five years ago, democracy itself was mortally threatened; now, the stakes are even higher. The Copenhagen climate conference is just three months away. Make no mistake, this is humanity's last realistic chance of heading off a climate calamity.

The ranks of climate deniers are now largely filled by stooges and dupes. Ostensibly plausible figures like Bjorn Lomborg (who last week unveiled "cheap" climate fixes) are foot soldiers in a fierce ideological war. Transnational corporations are defending their right to profit from pillaging and polluting our wounded planet to the bitter end.

**John Gibbons is conducting a workshop\* at the climate camp in Shannonbridge tomorrow**