

## Comment

# Corrupt system feters Obama

by Johann Hari

**I**S Barack Obama a politician whose actions should be judged soberly, or a figure from a feel-good fairytale to be revered from afar? For two years, most of the people who desperately wanted him to beat John McCain — as I did — have watched his actions through a distorting haze of hoping for the best. And when a week from now he is beaten at the mid-term elections by the Republicans, we will weep for him.

As Robert D Hodge says in *The Mendacity of Hope*: "Obama is judged not as a man but as a fable, a tale of moral uplift that redeems the sins of America's shameful past." Our longing for him to be Martin Luther King reborn meant good people have not pushed and pressured him, even as he endangered us with his policies. But if you choose to see this as another fairytale — of how one man who seemed like a Good Prince turned out to be a Traitor — you will miss the point, and the real need for change. This is not just about individual failings, but the endemic corruption in US politics.

To run for national office, you must raise huge sums from corporations and wealthy people. These corporations will only give you money if you persuade them you will serve their interests once in power. It's legalised bribery. Obama was brought to power by the "donations" — actually investments — of Goldman, JPMorgan Chase, IBM, General Electric, and more. So it is unsurprising that his presidency has largely served their interests.

The corporations are getting massive returns on their investment. Two-thirds pay no federal tax on income, and they rake in a fortune from the decision to spend 44 per cent of the entire federal budget on a largely unnecessary war machine.

Imagine if, when Obama came to office, he had articulated the real solutions — and, when blocked, named the corrupt corporations and senators stopping him getting healthcare for sick kids or preventing another crash. And told the people they will always be screwed over until they end this corruption and pay for the democratic process themselves.

It's long past time to put away your Obama T-shirt and grab a protest banner. — *Independent*