



American Capitalists *Bank* on Renewal through Obama

An extra 17,000 U.S. troops will be sent to Afghanistan, the President announced. Motivating this new surge, he argued that the Afghan intervention “has not received the strategic attention, direction and resources it urgently requires.” “I think Afghanistan is still winnable,” the President insisted. That’s the right-wing former President Bush of course? No - that’s the new President Barack Obama just weeks after taking office! The tone coming out of Washington may have changed but the substance has not.

Obama is certainly many things that Bush is not: intelligent, articulate, charismatic. But he is an officer of the same brutal and anti-egalitarian system that Bush served. Thus, while the conservative Bush is gone and the liberal Obama is in, America’s industries, oil fields, property and banks remain in the hands of the same few filthy rich as before. Meanwhile, the military officers, police, judges, CIA agents and top ranking bureaucrats remain the very same ones that have been enforcing imperialist looting abroad and an unfair social order upon the poor at home. Obama has no intention of taking on this establishment. This was emphasised by his choices for cabinet posts. He has

maintained Bush's man Robert Gates as Secretary of Defence. Hillary Clinton, a figure very much associated with the American establishment, has been selected as Secretary of State.

Nevertheless, many in America and around the world greeted the inauguration of a black person as President with genuine joy. After all, the U.S. is a country where black people were brought in chains as slaves. A country where just a few decades ago black people were formally barred from many restaurants and shops. Many hope that Obama will challenge the continued racist oppression that American blacks suffer. They will be disappointed. Obama has made clear that he is a "new type" of black politician: one who while occasionally talking about equality has no agenda for struggle for black liberation. Obama does not seek to challenge racist police violence and the profoundly racist legal system – a system where a black man on drug charges is almost twelve times as likely to be jailed as a white man on drug charges (based on a survey of 34 American states.) Instead, at times his message to American blacks has been the patronising one that their disadvantaged position arises from their own failures to take "family responsibility" rather than from racist discrimination. That line is a version of that which is promoted here, much to the disgust of most in the Aboriginal community, by conservative black leaders like Noel Pearson and Warren Mundine. Obama's moralising lectures so angered veteran black politician Jesse Jackson that, last July, Jackson famously remarked in a private conversation (that was picked up by a media live microphone) that, "Barack [has] been talking down to black people ... I wanna cut his nuts out!"

A VOTE AGAINST HARD RIGHT POLICIES BUT NOT A VOTE FOR CLASS STRUGGLE

Regardless of Obama's politics, it is not insignificant that many citizens in the racist U.S. have been prepared to vote for a black person as President. The election of a person who is both black and a liberal indicates a swing in the U.S. population's mood away from the hard right politics of the Republicans. Many American people grew sick of the Republicans blaming blacks and the poor for every domestic problem. They are furious that the Bush gang tricked them into supporting the Iraq invasion. And as they face ever more severe job cuts, the population became skeptical that "free market" economic policies and tax cuts for the rich is what is going to save them.

However, although the popular support for Obama represented a rejection of the hard right it did not bring with it a mood for class struggle within the working class. Obama in no way stood as a candidate representing the particular interests of workers as opposed to their exploiters. Rather, he presented himself as a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 93

American Capitalists *Bank* on Renewal through Obama

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31



Americans protest on the sixth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq & oppose the occupation of Afghanistan.

candidate for all classes who would uphold the current system while making it fairer. The advent of Obama has, in fact, increased illusions amongst the masses that the American establishment itself can deliver social equity.

That the Obama electoral triumph, if anything, dulled workers' class consciousness means that even the present shift away from the conservative right wing is fragile. Without an understanding that it is the capitalist profiteers who are responsible for unemployment, recession and decay the masses will be vulnerable to rightwing demagogy when they see that the new Administration is no more able to satisfy their aspirations than the previous one. The conservatives are waiting in the wing. And they will be able to mobilise right wing activists from amongst the all too many bigoted elements who were horrified that a black person should become President. Hence, there is a real danger that the rise of the liberal Obama could turn out to be just a prelude to a right-wing regime more frightening than Bush's – perhaps led by a Sarah Palin-like figure. While the left rest on their illusory laurels, the frighteningly fascist right are now surely mobilising their forces, stirred up like a wasps' nest ready to strike!

Only by mobilising their own power to squeeze concessions out of the exploiters can the working class begin to address the needs of the American masses and stop the re-emergence of the right. The working class can through industrial

action force companies to avoid shedding jobs. And its power can be mobilised in a campaign to demand free health care for all. In all such struggles of the American workers movement, black workers will be at the forefront. These workers will join together the multiracial workers' movement with the ghetto poor in the fight for black liberation.

To win its struggles at home, the American working class will need to unite in common cause with the toilers of the world. To do this it must prove to the masses in the "Third World" in particular that it is completely opposed to the imperialist marauding of its "own" rulers. In an important example of the type of struggle that is needed, West Coast U.S. dock workers held a union stopwork on May 1 last year in protest at the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Such actions must be deepened into a broad campaign of industrial action to demand the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from both Iraq and Afghanistan. The workers movement should also oppose the massive U.S. military support that enables Washington's Israeli ally to conduct such overwhelming terror against the Palestinian people.

WHY MANY CORPORATE BIG WIGS SUPPORTED OBAMA

Something that should encourage the downtrodden masses is the fact that Obama's ascendancy is an indirect sign that the American capitalist rulers feel that they are on the back foot. As many know too well, the U.S. capitalists are deeply racist and conservative. That they felt it necessary to support or at least tolerate the election of a black, liberal president shows how much they must feel that they need to improve their state's image. And we should not kid ourselves: Obama could not have been elected to the presidency unless a significant section of the U.S. capitalist class accepted this. Through their control of the media that they own and through massive campaign funding to favoured candidates, it is the wealthy elite that ultimately tilts the balance in elections.

The U.S. ruling class has been stunned by the setbacks that they have met in Iraq. They are also increasingly attune to the anti-Washington hostility that is burgeoning from South America to the Middle East to the Philippines. Hence, some of the capitalist elite reasoned that only if a person without direct links to the hated George Bush would become president will there be a hope that hostility to U.S. "leadership" would subside.

In deliberating over how to manage the unpopularity of the United States, the U.S. capitalists give much weight to matters concerning the Communist Party-ruled Peoples Republic of China (PRC). They know that while they have been mired in their unpopular "war on terror," the socialistic PRC has been busy winning new friends in Latin America, Africa and Central Asia through mutually beneficial economic relationships. Meanwhile, U.S. terror bombings in Iraq

and Afghanistan, torture in Guantanamo Bay and indifference to black people affected by Cyclone Katrina have all discredited Washington's attacks on the PRC over "human rights." As a result, pro-American, "pro-democracy" forces within the PRC have been losing ground. The U.S. elite desperately wanted to reverse this and realised that they needed to advertise U.S. capitalist "democracy" in a much more slick way. When they then saw the highly competent Obama make his charge, some of them decided that the only way to mask the racism of Western capitalist "democracies" was to put such a black liberal into the White House.

As well as wanting to give their state a fresh image by having a black liberal as president, ruling class Obama supporters also believe that his political program is what is needed to take capitalist America out of its mess. Much of the establishment knows that the Iraq adventure has been a total disaster for the U.S. and agrees with Obama's plan for a phased withdrawal of most combat troops. Like Obama, they think that the U.S. should revert in Iraq to the method that it has long favoured in places like Latin America and South-East Asia: which is to arm and train a puppet regime and get this regime to do Washington's bloody work for it. The capitalist elite also salutes Obama's vow to focus military forces on Afghanistan and Pakistan. When the President announced the recent increase in troop numbers in Afghanistan, the statement he released said that "the fact that we are going to responsibly draw down our forces in Iraq allows us the flexibility to increase our presence in Afghanistan." "Way to go Barack!" would have been the response to this announcement by many in corporate boardrooms, in the military top brass and in the State Department.

Similarly, a good chunk of the capitalist class came to realise that Obama was right when he says that the open torture at Guantanamo Bay has given the American system a very bad name. Better to fall back on the CIA's tried and tested practice of outsourcing torture to henchmen abroad (like the governments of Egypt and Jordan.) And to conduct "our" own "intensified interrogation" only in secret, like in the far away Bagram Air base in Afghanistan. "God damn it, why didn't Bush do it that way," now exclaim America's rich elite.

As for Obama's economic policies, a year ago many in the capitalist class were distrustful. They didn't like any increase in government intervention in the economy – that would be a violation of "free market" principles. But then came the collapse of the financial system. The bank owners asked to be bailed out by the government. The finance and industrial capitalists thought to themselves, "Heck, I do believe in the 'free market' but even more than that I believe in being able to make a lot of profit. Maybe we need Obama to come in and save capitalism from itself with some better regulation.... and some bigger bailouts for us shareholders."



The two sides of U.S. politics: bitter rivals? Obama and McCain grin and leer at each other like the best of mates as they stretch across a delighted-looking Cardinal Egan, the Archbishop of New York, to shake hands at the Alfred E. Smith Dinner held during the U.S. presidential campaign last year. All three seemingly ecstatic that American capitalism's future was assured, whatever the result of the election.

Meanwhile, the American corporate tycoons were getting frightened that the masses were getting rather upset with them. Perhaps, they thought, it would be better to have a liberal president who would pacify the masses with a few concessions. The conclusion reached in various fancy corporate lunches (at the downing of the fifth bottle of Chardonnay) was that it was a lower cost solution to allow slightly expanded healthcare coverage than to have angry workers and poor people launching strikes and demonstrations.

Of course, before the ruling class was to accept a black liberal presidential candidate, it first put him through a series of loyalty tests. The sternest of these was the one in connection with Obama's decades-long pastor, friend and confidant, Jeremiah Wright. In March last year, U.S. ABC News had shown bits of earlier sermons by Wright that powerfully exposed the racist oppression that American blacks suffer and which denounced American government terror from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the invasion of Iraq. Wright's plainly accurate statements were the subject of intense scrutiny by the tycoon-owned media which demanded that Obama distance himself from Wright. Obama obliged. He sacked Wright from his campaign committee and stated that Wright had "mischaracterized

what I believe is the greatness of this country." Later Obama went even further and publicly broke off his friendship with Wright, stating that "Whatever relationship I had with Reverend Wright has changed, as a consequence of this." Then in May, Obama put the final nail into the coffin of his friendship with Wright. He announced that he and his wife had left Wright's Trinity United Church of Christ, stating that "our relations with Trinity have been strained by the divisive statements of Reverend Wright, which sharply conflict with our own views."

At the same time, the American establishment sought from Obama an unequivocal statement of support for Israel in its conflict against the Palestinian resistance. And again he did not disappoint. In a speech last June at the influential American Israel Public Affairs Council, Obama not only stated that he would "never compromise when it comes to Israel's security" but insisted that "Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel and it must remain undivided." East Jerusalem is part of the territories that Israel unilaterally annexed in the 1967 war and its hold over all of Jerusalem is not even recognised by the U.N. Obama's hawkish comments naturally appalled Palestinian people. But they were not only hailed by rightwing Jews in the U.S. but also by America's mainly Protestant ruling elite who see Israeli power as a key enforcer of U.S. capitalist interests in the Middle East.

As Obama passed more and more of their tests and as the economy sunk ever deeper, wider and wider sections of the ruling class pinned their hopes on an Obama presidency. Prior to his election, there had been much despondency amongst them. The economic crisis, disaster in Iraq, setbacks in Afghanistan, the success of communist-ruled China, hatred of America everywhere, this was all breeding self-doubt in the capitalists about their capacity to rule. "Hell, I think one or two of our own are even starting to question our 'right' to rule." We need Obama now to bring back morale, they thought. All this has a surreal quality to it. Even the liberal wing of the capitalist class has an, at very best, patronising attitude to black people. Now, they wanted a black man to be their saviour. Even Rupert Murdoch's media outlets, infamous worldwide for whipping up racism and hardline conservative ideas, were pinning their hopes on Obama. Here, the Murdoch family's *The Australian* newspaper greeted Obama's inauguration with the headline "AMERICA'S RENEWAL."

"NO WE CAN'T! ... SORRY"

Not everyone in the world was feeding into the Obama hype. In the Gaza strip where the people had been devastated by Israel's genocidal invasion, residents were not too impressed. As the then incumbent President, Obama had given a nod and a wink to the Israeli assault, while slyly taking a low profile on the issue.

His silence on Gaza, indeed, said it all.

Nevertheless, within the U.S., by the time of his inauguration there were people from wide sectors of society that were pinning all their hopes on Obama. Yet what one constituency wants Obama to do is often the complete opposite of what the other wants. There are black people and anti-racists that expect that a black President would begin to eradicate racist discrimination in America. On the other hand, there are paternalists that hope that Obama's exhortations to blacks to "take personal responsibility" would finally quench the flames of black peoples struggle for justice. There are anti-war campaigners that are encouraged by Obama's promise of a timetabled withdrawal from Iraq but then there are flag waving militarists who expect the new president to greatly boost the U.S. war in Afghanistan. There are poor people desperately clinging on to Democrat promises of greater access to medical care pitted against rich bank shareholders that expect Obama's program of greater government intervention in the economy to translate into more taxpayer-funded bailouts of financial institutions. Most fundamentally, there are on the one hand workers that hope Obama will protect their jobs and wages and, on the other hand, greedy capitalists that anticipate that a liberal President is better able to make workers wear lower wages and reduced employer-funded pension and health care contributions.

Prior to his inauguration, Obama skilfully covered up all these conflicting aspirations. He utilised nice sounding but totally vacuous slogans that were designed to allow any particular constituency to read into the slogans whatever they wanted the slogans to mean. The most famous of these slogans was, "Yes we can!" For the first period of his presidency, too, Obama will enjoy a honeymoon period as Kevin Rudd has here. By making largely symbolic steps to distance themselves from some of the most extreme and despised policies of the previous Bush regime, the new Administration will retain some popularity. But given the depth of the economic crisis, the honeymoon will not last long. Soon each of the different constituencies will want their conflicting claims decided in a way favourable to them.

So, in whose favour will be settled the conflicting claims of Obama Administration supporters? Well, since the new government remains based on capitalist economic relations and on the existing capitalist state, it cannot but seek to "resolve" the conflicting demands in a way that upholds both America's subjugation of "Third World" peoples and the capitalist exploitation of labour at home. When that happens working class people, opponents of imperialist war, blacks, immigrants and all the poor will all certainly feel cheated. But their anger can go in three different ways. They can simply become demoralised and for a period turn their backs on political activity. Alternatively, the anger of workers and the middle class could be diverted by right wingers. The masses insecurities

could get misled into protectionist campaigns to blame “cheap” overseas producers for “taking American jobs,” into anti-immigrant demands and into perennial scapegoating of black people and welfare recipients. But then there is also Alternative Three: the working class mobilises in class struggle against their exploiters and unites their fight with the struggles for justice for blacks, Hispanics, Asians and all of the oppressed. It is the task of American socialists to ensure that it is this last variant that comes to the fore. But for the left to be able to rise to this task, it must be clear in its own minds about the nature of the Obama Administration. The left must be clear that while a smart, black liberal has replaced a stupid, white right winger as President, the new Administration, exactly like the previous one, is a **capitalist** Administration. Thus it is the **enemy** of working class people, blacks and the “Third World” masses.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE ROAD IS THE ONLY ROAD TO LIBERATION

In Australia as in the U.S., the ruling class has seized on the election of a black U.S. president to promote the lie that the Western capitalist “democracies” are fair societies where everyone has an opportunity to succeed. In a front-page article on Obama’s inauguration, foreign editor of Murdoch’s *The Australian*, Greg Sheridan claims that “In America, talented people from all types of backgrounds reach the top if they work hard” (21 January 2009) Nauseating stuff! Sheridan, a hard right-winger is simply ecstatic at the rise of the liberal Obama. Why? Because:

“... to fall in love with Obama, as the world is showing every sign of doing, it is necessary to fall in love with America

“Here’s another profound trick. Obama has kept most of the policies – and a startling number of the people – from the heart of Bush administration.

“Millions of people who six months ago hated the US will now be doing what they can to help a Washington administration succeed in the world.

“That is the dawn of a bright new day, and a remarkable sign of America’s resilience, and perhaps the world’s last best hope.”

Such propaganda from Murdoch’s scribes can fool some people for some time. But Sheridan has hardly the credibility to sway leftists. He is an extreme opponent of Palestinian resistance to Israel, a fanatical anti-communist and a hardcore supporter of the racist “war on terror”. Yet there are less unpalatable forces than Murdoch hacks who are also trying to seize on the Obama phenomenon. These include ALP social democrats, Greens and middle class liberals. Those tendencies have all responded to Obama’s election by going over and giving an ear bashing to radical progressives. Young Labor students berating their socialist rivals, rich pseudo-enlightened lawyers trying to woo Aboriginal activists, mainstream peaceniks carping away at far-left anti-war activists, they are all banging away on the same note: “Follow the Obama road! Abandon your

militant strategy. Work within the system to achieve change - we are now in the Obama era." Their exhortations will be mixed in with corrupting appeals to the weaker side of some activists. They will say: "Look you are very talented. If you junk your radicalism and work within the system you will while changing the world also look after yourself. We have connections, funding and infrastructure to help you realise your dreams like Obama did. Work with us." "Absolutely not! No way!" must be the unambiguous response.

It is up to committed socialists to ensure that left activists are not swayed by "follow the Obama road" appeals. To carry out this duty, socialists will have to reassert some of the core principles of Marxism. This includes the understanding that job cuts and poor wages are not merely the result of some bad individuals at the top of government or industry. Rather, they are the product of the system. A system in which enterprises are largely owned by a few wealthy individuals and in which these private owners ensure that their companies are administered with the sole aim of maximising profit extraction from workers' labour. It is this capitalist system that breeds racism as the owning class must whip it up in order to stop the multiracial workers that they exploit from uniting against them. Capitalism inevitably also leads to the propertied class in the richer countries exploiting the masses in the poorer countries and this exploitation is sometimes enforced by direct military intervention. Thus, no matter what the particular character of its leaders, any government that bases itself on the capitalist economic system must necessarily be a government that administers exploitation, racism and imperialism. In order to challenge this exploitation, racist discrimination and militarism, the working class, alongside all of the oppressed, must take class struggle action against the capitalists. The immediate aim of these struggles is to win concessions from the capitalist rulers. But these struggles for immediate concessions must be waged in such a manner that they train the toiling masses to understand that they must eventually seize political and economic power. Such a seizure of power, a socialist revolution, will rip the means of production out of the hands of the capitalists and place them into the collective hands of all the people. When such socialist revolutions take place in the most powerful countries in the world, we can then be sure that we are finally on the road to a society where there will be no exploitation of human by human.

This class struggle approach takes more hard work and sacrifice than the "Obama way." What is more, unlike those pursuing the "Obama way", class struggle activists will not gain (and should not gain) any personal financial or career benefit from their efforts. But the revolutionary class struggle way is the **only way** that can satisfy the needs of the exploited and downtrodden. •