Inauguration Day 2005: imperial delusions and political reality

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The following statement is also posted in PDF *format.*

The formal installation of the second-term administration of George W. Bush brings to power the most reactionary government in United States history. There is more than symbolic significance in the fact that the inauguration takes place against the backdrop of a virtual lockdown of the nation's capital, the real purpose of which is to inspire fear and intimidate domestic political opposition, while, behind the police/military barricades, Bush's corporate sponsors shamelessly indulge themselves at balls and parties.

It is necessary to make a sober evaluation of the prospects for Bush's second term. This is a government which, under the mantra of the "war on terror," seeks to promote a perpetual state of panic and hysteria. Such fear-mongering is the stock in trade of a deeply unstable and crisis-ridden regime.

On the very eve of Inauguration Day 2005, the airwaves were full of reports of a terrorist threat from a band of assassins who had crossed the border from Mexico and were targeting Boston—reports that, by the time of the evening news broadcasts, were being debunked as utterly groundless.

In the depths of the Great Depression, when American society was reeling under the impact of bank failures, factory closures and dust storms sweeping the plains, Franklin Roosevelt declared in his 1933 inaugural address that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror..." That was a period when the American ruling class still believed that it had rational answers to its problems.

The present government assumes office with the hope that it can somehow evade its mounting global and domestic problems precisely by spreading "nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror." Its attempt to keep the population in a state of perpetual panic testifies to the fact that, behind the bombast and saber-rattling, it can see no rational way out of the contradictions that bedevil it.

With the 2004 election—in Bush's words, his "moment of accountability"—out of the way, the circle of conspirators who determine policy—Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, etc.—are already implementing plans to expand the war in the Middle East and dismantle whatever remains of the social and democratic gains achieved by the American working class in a century of struggle.

As Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh revealed in his latest *New Yorker* article, plans for war against Iran are already well advanced, and up to ten countries in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia have been targeted for operations by Pentagon-run assassination squads. These operations, carried out in defiance of international law and the principle of national sovereignty, embody a level of global lawlessness whose closest parallel is the record of German imperialist subversion and conquest under Hitler's Nazi regime.

According to Hersh, these plans include the participation of US special forces in terrorist groups and their activities—raising the likelihood of another terrorist attack being used to provide the *casus belli* for new military adventures, whether in Iran or elsewhere. Such methods of provocation and conspiracy are the essential modus operandi of a government that rejects any form of democratic accountability—either to Congress or the people.

The Pentagon responded by attacking Hersh, without addressing the substance of his revelations. Bush, in an interview with NBC News, did not deny Hersh's claim that the US already has military forces on the ground in Iran, and said his administration was not ruling out any options in its policy toward the country.

This expansion of American aggression overseas can only have the most catastrophic and bloody consequences. In its insane drive for global hegemony through force of arms, American imperialism will inevitably set off a chain reaction of diplomatic, economic and military countermeasures by its great power rivals in Europe, Russia and Asia, bringing the world once again to the brink of a military holocaust.

The staggering costs for implementing the imperial aims of the American oligarchy abroad are to be placed squarely on the shoulders of working people at home. There will be no let-up in the fear-mongering and lies churned out to justify the "war on terror," and the police-state measures implemented in its name.

The second Bush administration is preparing to accelerate the process of stacking the courts with arch-reactionaries who will rubber-stamp any and all measures to shred the Constitution and destroy democratic rights. Clarence Thomas, a stalwart of the fascistic faction on the US Supreme Court, is considered a likely candidate to replace the soon-to-retire William Rehnquist as chief justice.

The administration is pushing proposals to begin the dismantling of all government-backed economic safeguards, including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. With its call for tax "reform," it is targeting the graduated income tax in favor of regressive tax structures that will shift the burden even more decisively from big business and the rich onto the working people. Bush's demand for "tort reform" is the spearhead of a campaign to free corporations

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from any accountability for the socially destructive consequences of their insatiable profit drive and remove all legal restrictions on the accumulation of personal wealth.

The Democratic Party, which paved the way for Bush's reelection by repudiating the anti-war sentiment of Democratic voters and refusing to provide a serious alternative to the anti-working-class policies of the Republicans, will offer no real resistance to a second Bush administration. It has already signaled its readiness to fall into line by supplying the necessary votes to confirm his major cabinet appointees, including officials, such as Condoleezza Rice and Alberto Gonzales, who would figure prominently as defendants in a future war crimes trial, and Michael Chertoff, a central architect of the police-state measures employed after 9/11.

The second Bush administration is determined to utilize the next four years to radically and irrevocably restructure American society in line with the foreign and domestic requirements of the financial oligarchy whose interests it serves. The reckless and headlong character of its policies is portrayed by the media, and misinterpreted by those who are taken in by its propaganda, as a sign of unassailable strength.

How is it to be explained that the Bush White House reacts to the disastrous results of its invasion of Iraq, launched on the basis of claims declared by its own weapons inspector to have been false, and provoking ever greater popular opposition within the US, by preparing to widen the war? What accounts for its determination to pursue domestic policies flagrantly favoring the rich in the teeth of overwhelming opposition within the US population?

The fundamental answer is that this is a government of permanent crisis. It rests on a narrow and unstable social base and reflects the position of a ruling elite that is driven by mounting economic contradictions for which it has no rational solution. It exemplifies the aphorism: weak governments take strong measures.

There is an objective logic and rational explanation for the deeply reactionary and disoriented nature of the Bush administration. The turn by American capitalism to the use of military force as its primary instrument of foreign policy—summed up in the Bush doctrine of preventive war—is ultimately a reflection of the economic decline of the United States and its loss of industrial and financial hegemony. A desperate ruling elite seeks to reverse its declining world position, or at least retard the rate of decline, through provocation and military violence.

The indices of this decline are stark and undeniable—above all, the massive and growing indebtedness of American capitalism, expressed in record budget, trade and balance of payments deficits. The precipitous decline of the US dollar on world currency markets, and the emergence of the euro as a rival world reserve currency, are far more credible indications of the objective position of American capitalism in the world economy than the Pentagon's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

Even in purely electoral terms, the position of the Bush administration is anything but secure. Despite the cowardice and incompetence of the campaign of John Kerry, Bush was reelected by a narrow margin—the smallest margin of victory for an incumbent president in modern American history.

The media's own opinion polls belie Bush's claims that the election gave him a mandate for his foreign and domestic policies. Bush's approval ratings, hovering between 48 percent and 51 percent, are the lowest of any reelected president in the run-up to his inauguration for more than a century. A solid and growing majority thinks the war in Iraq was a mistake, and a majority opposes Bush's plans to partially privatize Social Security and "reform" the tax code.

Those who take as given another four years of Bush should consider the fate of the second Nixon administration. Nixon was likewise reelected in the midst of an unpopular war, on the basis of an appeal to backward and confused popular sentiments. If anything, his position at the time of his 1973 inauguration was more secure than that of Bush. Nixon was reelected with a landslide majority in both popular and Electoral College votes. More fundamentally, the underlying crisis of American capitalism—the US was still the world's largest creditor nation—was far less advanced 32 years ago than today.

Yet in less than two years, Nixon was driven out of office, under conditions of a massive eruption of anti-war protest and social battles by the working class.

A new mass movement of social struggle and political opposition will emerge out of the bloody wreckage of US military adventures abroad and the unprecedented assault on living conditions and democratic rights at home. The conditions that produced, two years ago next month, the largest international demonstrations against war in world history, have not disappeared. They have intensified.

No one can credibly claim that there is mass support for Bush's policies of war and social reaction. The fate of this administration is not yet decided. It will be determined by the political character of the popular movement that emerges against it.

This movement must be consciously and politically prepared, and this preparation must begin now. A campaign must be developed to fight this administration, based not on the electoral calculations of the Democratic Party for 2008, but rather on a systematic effort to politically clarify the growing ranks of workers, students and others who will be propelled into struggle.

The fight must be undertaken to imbue the opposition to Bush with a new, socialist political orientation, one that addresses the underlying source of war and reaction—the capitalist profit system itself. It must bring together the currents of opposition to American imperialism that are growing all over the world, and link the struggle against war with the defense of democratic rights and the fight for economic and social equality.

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