

# One year since Obama's inauguration

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One year ago today, on January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States. The event was greeted with enthusiasm in the US, as well as in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere. Many millions around the world hoped the long period of political reaction in the US was finally ending. A year later, this wishful thinking has turned into disillusionment, anger and opposition.

Some 2 million people gathered in Washington on Inauguration Day to celebrate the end of the Bush years. From the opening words of his address, however, Obama indicated that he would continue the policies of his Republican predecessor that had been repudiated by the American people.

Before making any reference to the economic and social crisis gripping America, Obama declared, "Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred." This was an unmistakable olive branch to the Republicans and a declaration that his administration would uphold the bogus "war on terrorism" in order to justify militarism and attacks on democratic rights.

He went on to assert that the American people themselves shared the blame for the financial disaster, cynically foisting responsibility on the victims of a catastrophe entirely the making of the ruling class.

The president who ran as the candidate of "change" has continued the right-wing policies of Bush. In foreign policy, he has maintained the occupation of Iraq, increased US troop levels in Afghanistan, and expanded the war into Pakistan.

Obama has explicitly upheld the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive war, by which the US arrogates to itself the right to wage war against any target it deems a present or potential danger to its interests. Yemen has become the latest target of US threats, along with Iran, while the tragedy in Haiti has been used to carry out a military occupation and strengthen the stranglehold of US imperialism on that impoverished country.

The American gulag in Guantanamo remains open, renditions and torture continue, and the administration has

insisted that no one from the Bush administration or the CIA be held accountable for war crimes and violations of international law.

In a statement issued on Election Day 2008, the *World Socialist Web Site* succinctly characterized the class interests that the new administration represented and would defend. The WSWS pointed out that "powerful forces in the American political and financial establishment have rallied behind Obama precisely because they believe that he, after eight disastrous years of Bush, will help restore the battered image of American imperialism. The hundreds of millions of dollars that Obama has received from the business community testify eloquently to the social and financial interests that he represents."

In his inaugural address, Obama declared that the American people would have to submit to a "new era of responsibility." Commenting on these remarks, the WSWS wrote on January 22, 2009, "The meaning of these arguments is unmistakable. The advent of Obama will signal no reprise of the New Deal or the Great Society. There will be no revival of social reformism, but rather a turn to fiscal austerity and counter-reforms directed against what little remains of a social safety net in America, embodied in such programs as Social Security and Medicare.

"The central political aim of the new administration, like the one that it is replacing, will be protecting the interests and wealth of a narrow financial elite, who will be bailed out at the expense of millions of American workers and their families."

Obama staffed his administration with corrupt representatives of Wall Street, including former New York Federal Reserve President Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers, two protégés of Robert Rubin, the chief architect of financial deregulation during the Clinton years. Over the last year, the administration has expanded the scale of the Wall Street bailout, which has allowed the banks to make huge profits, hand out tens of billions in compensation and resume their speculative activities.

No relief has been forthcoming for the millions of workers who have lost their jobs and homes. On the contrary, the White House has used the economic crisis to force through a drastic and permanent reduction in the living standards of the working class, beginning with the forced bankruptcies of General Motors and Chrysler and the wage and benefit reductions imposed on auto workers.

The Obama White House has refused to provide relief to the states, leading to unprecedented attacks on public education and other social services. With its push for health care “reform,” the administration aims to reduce corporate and government spending by rationing health care, slashing benefits for millions of working people and drastically cutting Medicare spending.

Obama’s second year will begin with a State of the Union address next week in which he will unveil an agenda of budget-cutting and austerity. In order to finance the ongoing bailout of the wealthiest 1 percent of the American people, the administration is preparing to slash entitlement programs and impose regressive taxes on the working population.

From day one, Obama has worked unflinchingly to rehabilitate the Republicans, after they had been decisively repudiated by the voters in the 2008 election. He appointed former Bush officials, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and sought to tailor his policies to the demands of the Republican right. The latest instance of the mantra of bipartisanship is Obama’s revolting appointment of George Bush, an unrepentant war criminal, to co-head with Bill Clinton the US “relief” effort in Haiti.

Obama’s posturing as the tribune of “new politics” and the apostle of progressive change was a fraud. He was selected and elevated by powerful sections of the ruling elite, who calculated that a young African-American in the White House would provide more favorable conditions to push through their reactionary agenda.

The last year has exposed the democratic and progressive pretensions of identity politics, and demonstrated that the fundamental division in American society is not race, nationality or gender, but class.

It has also exposed the role of publications like the *Nation* and other pseudo-left supporters of Obama, who campaigned for him and continue to defend his policies, including the war in Afghanistan and the gutting of health care. These are right-wing forces that represent privileged social layers who are contemptuous of and hostile to the working class.

As the administration begins its second year, it is gripped by crisis. The debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, and despite the recovery on Wall Street the social crisis is worsening and the chief cause of the economic meltdown—the decline in the world position of American capitalism—continues. The prospects for a second and even more destructive financial crash are all too real.

According to all opinion polls, Obama’s approval ratings have plummeted and a majority believes that the US is going in the wrong direction.

The Obama administration’s first year in power underscores the fundamentally undemocratic character of the entire political system. The aspirations and interests of the working population can find no expression within a system monopolized by two parties of big business.

The record of the administration has only intensified popular disillusionment with the government and all official institutions. “Capitalism,” as in much of the 20th century, is once again becoming a dirty word.

This foreshadows the emergence of a new period of class battles and social upheavals, not just in the US, but internationally. The central and most critical issue is the development of a new leadership to arm this coming movement with a revolutionary, socialist and internationalist program. That is the task to which the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party are dedicated.

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