

Obama Accession and the Change the World Demands

Saturday 21 February 2009, by [CPI \(ML\) Liberation](#) (Date first published: 27 January 2009).

The US – and the world – has just witnessed Bush's exit from and Obama's entry into the White House. The mood at Obama's inauguration – an event replete with symbolic resonances, situating the Obama Presidency in the history of the civil rights movement against racism in the US – indicates the endurance of that groundswell of popular hope in the US which powered Obama's campaign. For a US people reeling from financial crisis and the highly unpopular Bush presidency, Obama has offered a promise of 'change'. Obama is quite aware of this crisis of confidence – domestic as well as global – in the hegemony of the US empire. He began his inaugural speech by acknowledging the economy weakened by greed, the lost jobs and homes, expensive healthcare, and schools that fail many, and tried to address the « sapping of confidence ... a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable. » Clearly, for Obama, 'change' must mean a restoration of the deeply damaged credibility of the US. At the same time, for the people of the US, and much of the world too, it is clear that their hopes rest on a more thoroughgoing definition of change – a break with the long history of imperialist war-mongering and aggression and capitalist hubris

While wholeheartedly reiterating the immense significance of a popular victory of an African American in a US Presidential election, and the understandable vesting of hope in him by people bruised by two terms of the Bush Presidency, it must be said that Obama's inaugural speech took care to indicate more continuity than change with the policies of empire. His bland declaration that the debate over whether the market is a force of good or evil is irrelevant, and his reassurance that « (the market's) power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, » rather than indicating confidence, inadvertently perhaps let slip the anxieties about the widespread doubts being raised worldwide about the character of capitalism as a system, in the wake of the global financial crisis. He made it a point to establish continuity with the legacy of how « earlier generations faced down fascism and communism...with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. » Again, this reference reveals something about the renewed ideological challenge of communism and socialism for the US establishment. Obama's words suggest equal opposition to both fascism and communism. But in the second World War, it was the USSR that bore the main brunt of and played the main role in defeating fascism. Since then the US has never hesitated in condoning and even sponsoring fascist and dictatorial regimes to combat and contain communist regimes. Most of the US' Cold War alliances were with brutal dictatorships – Pinochet, Suharto, the Shah (Iran), killer regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador – as well as with forces like the Taliban in Afghanistan.

His offer of mutual respect and peace to the « Muslim world » carried little conviction, coming as it did alongside a resounding silence on US approved assault by Israel on Gaza. In an oblique reference, perhaps, to the likes of Chavez, Obama declared that leaders who tried to blame the West for their ills ought to remember that « your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. » To authoritarian regimes that silence dissent, he said, « we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist. » No doubt Obama will be reminded by the world's people that it is the US which has destroyed so much of what others have built – be it Allende's Chile, Mossadegh's Iran, or the cradle of world civilisation – Iraq. It is a neo-con apologist for the US empire who observed approvingly that « The hidden hand of the market cannot work without the hidden fist. » For the world's people, the « change we need » can happen only if the US which has throughout its

history used its military might to « make the world safe for » its corporations and commercial interests were to « unclench its fist » and end the occupation of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan.

Even as Obama echoes his immediate predecessor in his declaration that « We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, » we may recall the words of Martin Luther King Jr, who spoke 'truth to power' four decades ago to what he called « the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today : my own government. » (April 4, 1967)

The American people have given a powerful mandate against Bush and his policies ; the US people will now see how Obama delivers. Likewise, it is now time for the Indian people to deliver a powerful message in the coming elections - against the blatantly pro-American course followed by the UPA Government and its consequence : the disturbing growth of US intervention in our internal matters and the regional affairs of South Asia.

In Indian ruling circles, there is some anxiety about Obama's pronouncements (echoed more provocatively by the British Foreign Secretary David Miliband on his recent visit to India) on Kashmir. While Indian rulers may be chary of a US-brokered Kashmir solution, they are nevertheless doing all they can to facilitate increased US presence in the region. The US' FBI has virtually taken over the investigation into the Mumbai terror attacks ; recently, it was even audacious enough to whisk away an eyewitness - a woman from the fishing community of the city - to the US for « interrogation » ! The US has also intensified its efforts to entangle India further in its military misadventures. Recently the Indian Army Chief even hinted that India ought to send troops to Afghanistan as a strategic counter to Pakistan, pointing out that India has already been providing « soft assistance » there, but adding that it was up to the political leadership to take such a decision. There was no reprimand by the UPA Government for such irresponsible foreign policy statements by the Army Chief.

The pragmatic corporate discourse which has discovered in Modi the greatest icon of governance analyses Indo-US relations as though it was just a business deal - outsourcing benefits, technological assistance, and American admonition and arm-twisting of Pakistan. The economic crisis and terrorist threat exposes the utter hollowness of this approach and the huge costs we are paying for the mirage of perceived benefits are no longer a secret.

The time is ripe for India to say « Yes we can » to change in the grievously harmful « strategic partnership » of the Indian ruling class with US imperialism, and to forcefully demand a de-linking of Indian foreign and economic policy from the grand US design.

P.S.

* From ML Update, A CPI(ML) Weekly News Magazine, Vol. 12, No. 05, 27 JAN - 02 FEB 2009.