

American degradation: Trump returns to the White House

WSWS Editorial Board
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Today, the most degraded event in modern American political history is taking place. A convicted criminal, con man and pathological liar, a fascist demagogue in whom ignorance and bigotry vie for control with greed and vanity, will become “commander-in-chief” of the world’s most powerful military, armed with enough nuclear weapons to incinerate all life on the planet.

Nothing marks so clearly the irredeemable collapse of American democracy as the return of Donald Trump to the White House, four years after attempting to overthrow the last election by force and install himself as president-dictator despite his overwhelming defeat at the polls. Trump will be inaugurated as the 47th president of the United States, not by means of a coup d’état, as he sought to carry out on January 6, 2021, but thanks to his support in the financial oligarchy that rules America, along with the prostration and bankruptcy of his nominal opponents in the Democratic Party.

In March 2003, at the onset of the US invasion of Iraq, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote that American imperialism, despite its vast military apparatus, had embarked on a course that would lead to a “rendezvous with disaster.” It is now possible to give a date for that rendezvous: January 20, 2025.

Karl Marx famously declared that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. In the second inauguration of Donald Trump, this aphorism could be modified: the first time as farce, the second time as catastrophe. In elevating Trump for a second time to the presidency, the American ruling class has forfeited all political and moral credibility. It is the beginning of the end for American capitalism. It has sown the wind, and will now reap the whirlwind.

In 2017, it could have been said—albeit wrongly—that the entry of Trump into the White House was an aberration, a political accident, or merely the byproduct of Democratic Party incompetence and arrogance. No such claim can be made about the repetition of that event eight years later. It is now clear that Trump represents the quintessence of the American ruling class. His personal characteristics are a hideous expression of the main features of the oligarchy of billionaires whose wealth and power have swelled to unprecedented dimensions over the past four decades.

When Trump was first sworn in as president, on January 20, 2017, the Socialist Equality Party (US) issued a statement headlined, “The inauguration of Donald Trump: An event that will live in infamy.” This is what we wrote eight years ago:

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president is among the most ignominious events in the history of the United States. More than \$100 million is being spent on the celebrations of the new president’s installation. In vain! No amount of money can dispel the nauseating stink that pervades every aspect of this inauguration. Nor can the fraudulent orchestration of public festivities conceal the widespread sense that the country, with the installation of the new administration, has embarked on a path that will lead to a disaster of unimaginable dimensions.

History has caught up with American capitalism. The protracted process of economic and social decay has been covered over for decades with democratic phrases that served to disguise the gap between the official political myths and the underlying reality. But the mask has now come off. Donald Trump personifies the corruption, ruthlessness, parasitism and essentially fascist mindset of the capitalist oligarchs who control the United States. Trump will lead a government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich.

The SEP noted the sharp divisions within the US ruling elite, primarily over foreign policy, and whether US preparations for economic and military warfare should be directed first towards Russia, or China, or against its European imperialist rivals like Germany. We warned:

However bitter the disputes, all sections of the ruling class are united in their conviction that 1) American imperialism must pursue its global interests even at the risk of war; and 2) the attack on the social interests and political rights of the working class must be intensified. That Trump speaks and tweets not only for himself but on behalf of the ruling class is proven by the fact that his cabinet selections of billionaires and generals are sailing through the Senate confirmation proceedings with negligible opposition. As for Obama, he devoted his final press conference Wednesday to vouching for the political legitimacy of the incoming administration and declaring that, having won, “it is appropriate for [Trump] to go forward with his visions and his values.”

Not only was this assessment vindicated by events; it applies to the political situation today, only exponentially. The outgoing President Joe Biden personifies the decrepit state of the Democratic Party and American liberalism. Despite acknowledging, briefly, that Trump is a fascist, he has pledged the “smoothest transition” possible. And indeed, much of Trump’s fascist program will only extend and intensify the measures already undertaken by the Biden-Harris administration: mass deportations of immigrants; attacks on democratic rights, particularly against those who oppose the policies of American imperialism at home or abroad; economic warfare, political subversion and outright military aggression against countries targeted by Washington.

As the SEP declared eight years ago, the alternative to Trump will come only from the American and international working class. The record of the Biden administration is an unanswerable confirmation of this assessment. History will condemn his four years in the White House in much the same way as it has judged Germany’s Weimar regime: as an interlude during which the fascist forces were allowed to overcome their initial failures and reemerge as an even greater danger to the democratic and social rights of working people, both in America and around the world.

Moreover, with its focus on the escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, its unshakeable commitment to enabling Israeli genocide in Gaza, and its preparations for even wider wars against Iran and ultimately China, the Biden administration has already begun the first stages of a world war which it now hands off to the crazed militarists of the Trump administration, including figures such as the advocate and defender of war crimes Pete Hegseth, nominated to head the Pentagon.

There are many others who share responsibility for the resurrection of Trump. The socioeconomic processes that have given rise to the billionaire oligarchy operate not just through individuals, but through institutions like the corporate media and the political organizations of the affluent middle class, including the pseudo-left.

Figures like Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others have advanced a pathetic pseudo-reformism, promoting the fiction that meaningful change could be achieved within the political establishment while serving only to strengthen the stranglehold of the Democratic Party. The organizations of the pseudo-left have worked relentlessly to split the working class through the politics of race, gender and sexual orientation, and block the development of a mass socialist movement against American capitalism.

The corporate media has dropped any pretense of a critical approach to the incoming Trump administration, portraying Trump as the choice of the American people with mass popular support. Thugs, quacks and other fascist allies of Trump are treated as political sages, as in Sunday’s respectful interview by ABC News of Steve Bannon, convicted and jailed for defying a congressional subpoena to testify about his role in the coup attempt of January 6, 2021.

When the *New York Times* wrote yesterday that “bristling tension and angry defiance have given way to accommodation and submission,” it was speaking for itself, and for the Democratic

Party. As Trotsky once remarked, force not only conquers, it convinces.

The so-called “labor movement,” epitomized by unions like the AFL-CIO and UAW, is complicit in this degradation. In a column published Sunday, Shawn Fain, president of the UAW, who was promoted by the entire pseudo-left, pledged to “work with” the incoming administration, particularly on nationalist economic policy, following the lead of Teamsters President Sean O’Brien and others. The entire apparatus of the trade unions functions as adjuncts of corporate management and the state.

The return of Trump to the White House marks a new and dangerous phase in the crisis of American capitalism. Trump’s administration reflects the desperate effort of the American ruling class to resolve its insoluble contradictions and address the deepening economic crisis and mounting geopolitical tensions through authoritarianism and war. This is part of a global phenomenon, which is evident in all the major capitalist countries.

But Trump’s return does not signify the consolidation of fascism in America. Trump came to power on the basis of lies, exploiting the disillusionment and anger of broad sections of the population. Between the installation of the new regime and the implementation of his policies lies the resistance of the working class, which is entering into immense social struggles.

This vast contradiction defines the current situation. While the ruling class is shifting violently to the right, the general movement of the masses is to the left, toward social and political radicalization, in the US and internationally. And while the ruling class has abandoned the democratic ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence, and reasserted by Lincoln during the Civil War, the working class has not. They remain deeply embedded in the consciousness of the American masses. These ideals—of equality, liberty and justice—find their true expression today in the program of international socialism.

The revolutionary movement bases itself on this profound truth. The working class, facing ever-worsening conditions of exploitation and inequality, is the only social force capable of confronting and overthrowing the oligarchy that Trump represents.

As the United States and the world enter the period of Trump’s second term, the essential task is to build a socialist and revolutionary leadership within the working class.



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