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November 16, 2008

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The following is a translation of an article originally written in Spanish for the issue 35 of Pueblos magazine. This article deals with Obama and the hard task of restoration of the lost US hegemony and the false hopes his election has raised in many people, even from the left.

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us to believe that what has just happened in the US was something slightly short of the socialist revolution.

than the stick. Again, we will all be good friends and will admire the Hollywood-manufactured country. As Sarah Baxter writes in her article in the Sunday Times, “*America feels good about itself and its future again. Its moral standing in the eyes of the world rose overnight*”. Another article, from the Irish Times (November 8<sup>th</sup>), written by another US rhapsodist called Colm Tóibín, adds: “*All of us watched him [ed. Obama] with joy and pride, a feeling that this was an image of the US that could be shown all over the world, that the country could once more be ‘as a city upon a hill’, that some fundamental burden had been lifted, some ghost exorcised*”<sup>3</sup>. After the series of defeats led by Bush Jr. and the isolation state where he took the US Empire, Obama is like a Prophet who will return its Messianic sense of purpose to the Chosen People and will open again those doors that had been shut, in order to deepen Yankee penetration into the rest of the world.

The magic in Obama is that he has renewed the illusions in a worn-out model that is losing ground on a daily basis to the economic crisis; a crisis which has brought socialism back to the table as an alternative (to Obama’s own shock). After all, electoral politics is nothing but a kind of huge factory of dreams, which is back at work, full speed ahead. That factory of dreams has its cultural foundations built over the bubbly contributions of Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Ford and Playboy to western civilization, to name but a few of the unquestionable contributions of Yankee culture to the world. And certainly the factory of illusions has also been built with the providential help of free trade and under the stern surveillance of the US Marines. Waking up once again only to realize how little things are likely to change with the new “administration”, will be a hard business. Even if some clueless people on the left want

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<sup>3</sup> Let us remember that the metaphor of the “city upon the hill” was proclaimed with true utopian fervour by the Puritan John Winthrop in 1630, when he referred to the founding of their new colony, the seed destined to sprout later as the US.

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## Restoring the declining US hegemony

But we who have got tired of waiting and waiting, and decided to put our hands to work in the making of a new world through the autonomous struggle of the people, we know that neither imperialism will end thanks to the unselfish actions of the imperialists themselves, nor exploitation will end thanks to those who get rich from it. We hold no false illusions – even if Obama were a convinced “progressive”, we know that, at the end of the day, US imperialism is a well-established State policy, springing from the entrails of the powerful elite’s interests<sup>2</sup>. It is no coincidence that in the US, “governments” are called merely “administrations” in accordance with their typically pragmatic spirit. It is impossible to be any clearer about their precise role...

With this I don’t want to insinuate that the arrival of Obama in the White House does not represent a different, new scenario for the people’s struggle, or even that there aren’t some humble chances of advancing with some demands – mainly because of the high expectations caused by Obamania. But from acknowledging this objective fact to seeing in Obama a sort of self-styled hero of “progressive” causes or even to holding illusions that this election means an end to the US condition as a world hegemonic power, there’s a big gap...

In fact, quite contrary to those who expect liberation to come from the White House, Obama has turned out to be the Yankee ruling class’ best chance to restore their lost hegemony. Imperialism will adopt a friendly face and will swing the carrot a little bit more

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<sup>2</sup> In a previous article, “*Obama and Latin America, a friendly imperialism?*” (www.anarkismo.net) I have already gone into Obama’s programme towards Latin America, as it was revealed in a public meeting with the Cuban community in Miami, and there I already warned about the false illusions held by a left that still expects change to come from above and through elections, when Obama was chosen as the official democrat candidate. I believe this article remains relevant in its fundamentals.

Plan Colombia to finish? Can the peoples of the world expect the White House to do something to solve their endless list of demands? Those who like waiting can remain waiting per saecula saeculorum – that is, for centuries to come. Obama does not seem to be in any rush to change the old order radically, but he does seem more concerned about adding a new facade to it. Something like new condiments for an old soup. His declarations on Latin America or Palestine, even when he was still a candidate, give us enough reasons to suspect that it wouldn't be wise to expect any significant change<sup>1</sup>. The above-mentioned article reminds us that “*President-elect Obama is about to inherit two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and Osama Bin Laden is still at large (...) The threat of terrorism has not receded*”. So it seems that the so-called War on Terror will last as an important element of the political agenda. Let us mention, by the way, that those chosen to be members of his cabinet do not allow for much optimism, except for the more gullible among us...

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<sup>1</sup> It is very telling that the candid enthusiasm with which the so-called “progressive” governments of Latin America received the news of Obama’s victory. The presidents in the frontline of this motley collection of governments were eager to congratulate the US president-elect. Lula asked for the new government to work closer with Latin America (as if half a century of politics by remote control through the US embassies wasn’t enough!) and Chávez offered his hand to the very same person who treated him as a “manageable” threat during his campaign. Evo Morales asked him in vain to lift the Cuban embargo, when Obama himself was clear enough on his intentions to keep it in place despite his claims to be willing to engage in direct diplomacy with the Caribbean nation. Out of this motley collection, a conservative and fearful Uribe in Colombia is trying to explore ways to guarantee a Free Trade Agreement with the man who opposed it, arguing the systematic murder of trade unionists in that country. Also, Uribe wants to guarantee similar levels of military cooperation as with Bush through Plan Colombia, at a time when the counter-insurgent tactics of the Colombian government are coming under serious fire due to human rights violations.

The victory of Obama in the US presidential elections has echoed all over the world through the mass media, which is trying to convince us that the most relevant single event in 2 million years of human existence had just taken place. In the meantime, delirious public opinion all over the world, has celebrated Obama’s victory in a way they would not have celebrated even for a new government in their own countries –something barely surprising if we take into account that decisions taken by the rulers in Washington DC bring a heavy load of consequences to the shoulders of millions throughout the five continents. In the eyes of the hallucinated mass, Obama represents a “dream” come true – what type of a dream exactly is something no one has been able to describe yet. The nightmare of Bush seems to have reached an end.

## **Rise and Decline of the New World Order**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the firm imposition of the so-called New World Order, the American Dream has taken the entire face of earth by assault. That dream, indeed, was soon to become a nightmare well before Bush Jr. made his way into the White House. Neoliberal orthodoxy spread like a plague in successive privatising waves all over the Third World, bringing with it hunger, unemployment and uncertainty for the lives of millions. Unrest grew until it exploded in the very heart of the empire during the WTO demonstrations in Seattle, 1999. But with the arrival of George W. Bush in power, and thanks to his anti-terrorist crusade in 2001, the nightmare adopted almost apocalyptic dimensions. The US displayed an unprecedented autism in the face of a world saying a clear and unequivocal “NO” to his War on Iraq, something said from the UN to the people on the streets all over the planet, including, of course, US streets. What followed is well known and there’s no need to go into details: a genocide that left hundreds of thousands of dead,

millions of maimed and countless lives utterly shattered, only to satisfy the lust for “US dollars” of the arms and oil industry.

Therefore, the super-power which emerged with an aura of invincibility after the Cold War, sank into an unthinkable crisis at all levels – political, moral, diplomatic and also military, given its incapacity to defeat the Afghan and Iraqi insurgencies, who, in spite of their technical and numerical inferiority, demonstrated once again that the decisive factors in a conflict are never material things, but people. To make matters worse, the recent economic crisis has revealed the inner flaw of the single most advertised Washington dogma, that is, the almighty Free Market. With this new flank that has opened in the US’s hegemony crisis, things could not get any worse. Pessimism and unhappiness have won over the hearts of US citizens (and those of all the rhapsodists of their political and economic model in the rest of the world), who have seen the American Dream crumble into pieces in front of their eyes.

With Obama, this nightmare seems to be coming to a timely end, according to opinion makers and hallucinating journalists. The brand-new president of the US rises up like a champion, with the aura of a real-time Messiah, with the mission to give the world and the US back their hope in the American Dream. Obama is portrayed as the climax of the struggle for “Negro” rights in the US, initiated during the times of Martin Luther King. Obama is portrayed as the quintessential representative of a supposed US democratic and humanist tradition that had a brief interruption of sorts with the Bush administration. Before Bush, US imperialism, according to these Obama supporters, seemingly did not exist, or it was a rather minor problem, while they insist that after Bush, the “benign” influence of the US will again manage to impose itself globally – unfortunately, memory is a virtue more often associated with elephants than with human beings.

## The Obama Mirage

As a testimony of this worldwide illusion, it is enough to quote a headline on the US elections from the Sunday Times, on November 9<sup>th</sup>: “*Welcome Back America*” – a headline bordering on delirium and which, by the way, confuses a single country (US) with a continent (America), as is frequently the case in the English-speaking press (paradoxically, the very same press poked fun at the Republican vice-presidential candidate for exactly the opposite mistake, that is, confusing the African continent with a country). The subtitle is even more revealing: “*The Bush years tainted America’s reputation in the eyes of the world. But Sarah Baxter, our Washington correspondent, who grew up in the US, says the victory of Barack Obama has revealed the nation as it really is*”. There’s no stomach which can resist the test of checking all of the press on the matter without getting physically sick, but this is the tone set up for almost every single article written on the subject.

What is that “nation” really? Those of us who suffer from a kind of insomnia of the intellect and who like staying awake, we do not forget the countless acts of US aggression against Latin American people, the Philippines, nor the enthusiastic support given to all kinds of Third World dictators and to structurally genocidal regimes such as Israel or Colombia. Neither do we forget Vietnam or Korea, or the plundering of our natural resources and labour to which we’ve been subjected for a century. We can’t forget the nefarious effects of free trade policies, nor the economic sanctions imposed by the US on its contradictors. Everything mentioned certainly happened way before Bush, both with Republican and Democrat governments.

Can the peoples of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan or Haiti expect their respective occupations to come to an end after these elections? Can future generations to come expect Obama to take some real action against Global Warming? Can the Latin American people expect interventionism in the forms of the Plan Merida and