

Barracking for Obama
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Writing this a day before the US presidential election, I'm pretty certain that Barack Obama will win it. Not that I have much confidence in America's voters – or at least the majority that gave the Bush regime two terms in office.

Despite seeing a trillion of their hard-earned dollars thrown away on the idiotic Iraq adventure, and another trillion or so squandered on desperate attempts to fix their own plundered economy, millions are apparently happy to bank on more of the same from John McCain.

That the richest, most powerful nation on earth can still be held to ransom by a Republican party of rootin', tootin', gun-totin' racists, religious maniacs, robber-capitalists, and a rabble of outright ignoramuses is an affront to the US constitution and a disgrace to the ideals of democracy.

And the proposition that the dumb-as-dirt George Bush and his creepy VP Dick Cheney should be succeeded by the hopelessly hawkish 'war hero' McCain and the lipstick dipstick Sarah Palin is simply outrageous.

But even if Obama's president-elect by the time you read this, the US and the world will still be stuck with the mess of the Bush legacy for some time to come. And in any case, for all his apparent advantages and his advocacy of change, Obama may not, in the long term, prove a change for the better.

In fact, as a passionate supporter of change myself, I have to concede to mixed feelings as to the results.

On the positive side, and closest to home, I'm happy to say that the Rudd government in Australia has proven a marked improvement over the Howard regime I so abhorred. But even here my satisfaction's not entirely complete.

Kevin Rudd got rid of John Howard's anti-worker 'workplace agreements' legislation as promised; said 'sorry' to Australia's indigenous people as Howard had long refused to do; and in general, heads a government that appears far more people-friendly than that of his predecessor.

He hasn't abandoned Howard's fascist 'Pacific solution' to the refugee problem, however, and, just as Howard hypocritically chose not to oppose the hanging of Saddam Hussein, Rudd has failed to voice Australia's moral, ethical and legal opposition to the death penalty in the case of the Bali Bombers.

No change for the better

In the UK, where the mantle passed from Tony Blair to Gordon Brown, there seems to have been no change at all.

New Labour is now trying to bill itself as the saviour of the financial system that it spent

years failing to properly regulate, and still waging its war on terror with a terrifying disregard for democratic freedoms.

In this latter field, the government suffered a humiliating defeat when the House of Lords threw out a bill extending the period of detention without trial of terrorism suspects from 28 to 42 days.

And most pundits seem to agree that 'New' Labour's days in office are numbered, with real change due under David Cameron's Conservatives come the next general election.

In Russia there's also been a quite recent change that's made no apparent difference, except perhaps for the worse. Vladimir Putin stepped down from the presidency, engineered the election of his protégé, Dimitry Medvedev, as his replacement, then installed himself in the role of what some observers have called 'super' prime minister.

No change is yet evident in the massive corruption of its economy and institutions by the so-called 'oligarchs' who looted the nation following the fall of communism, the Putin-engineered repression of its media, and its paranoid and aggressive relationship with its former satellites and the west.

Change without difference is one thing, but change without direction or decision is another, and that appears to be the situation in Thailand.

I actually long ago gave up trying to understand what is – or isn't – happening there, following first a military coup, then the recent firing of the most recent prime minister for, of all things, appearing on a cooking show, and the occupation of government buildings by opponents of the now convicted but exiled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Confusion reigns over the question of change in Malaysia, too. Many saw Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as a harbinger of relief after 22 years of Mahathir-style monomania, mendacity, money-politics and institutional mayhem.

Abdullah showed some early promise by canceling Mahathir's projected crooked bridge to Singapore. But since then, he's either failed or refused to reform the crooked government, crooked judiciary, crooked police force, crooked civil service, crooked media or any other bent or broken legacies from his predecessor.

But the massive disappointment at Abdullah's failure to deliver substantive change at least achieved one thing. A wave of resentment that inspired the opposition and the electorate to first deprive Barisan Nasional of its treasured two-thirds majority in Parliament, then threaten its demise entirely with a power grab by Pakatan Rakyat.

Calling all wise leaders

But the prospect of change seems to have vanished for now, amid a murky melange of murder, corruption and sodomy allegations and counter-allegations, a series of jailings under the iniquitous Internal Security Act and the projected hand-over of the premiership to the deeply-suspect and widely-detested Najib Abdul Razak.

So the only change in Malaysia in the foreseeable future, now Anwar Ibrahim and his colleagues in Pakatan Rakyat have gone quiet, is likely to be for the worse.

But at least that won't be a downer and even possibly a disaster for the whole wide world, as the replacement of Bush and Cheney by McCain and Palin would be.

I trust that by the time you read this, Obama will have been elected President of the USA. First black president, or more accurately first Afro-Asian-Caucasian president, of the most powerful nation on the planet.

And I hope that President Obama will have the wisdom, understanding and strength to lead the US to its role as a world-leader in not just military and economic might, but also as the true global defender of the lives, liberties and opportunities to which we all have a right.

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