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05.02.2025

USAID “Marxists”? Once Again, Elon Musk Again Displays His Invincible Ignorance



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According to Elon Musk, USAID, America’s chief foreign aid agency, “deserves to die.” Why? Because it is “a viper’s nest of radical-left marxists who hate America.”

What planet does this strange fellow live on? I AM a radical-left Marxist professor – one who happens to love America – and for more than forty years I have been criticizing USAID for not being radical or leftist at all. What the irate oligarch means by “marxist” is anyone’s guess. I know a good many people who have worked for the agency and I’d bet money that the only ones who know anything about dialectical materialism, the organic composition of capital, or the theory of alienation are those who have taken my graduate classes.

What Musk doesn’t understand (inter alia) is that USAID has two conflicting missions. First, its employees and contractors try to relieve suffering in other lands by giving their people disaster relief, poverty relief, and technical assistance, and, above all, by promoting economic and social development. In the past 64 years they have helped to save millions of lives around the globe and have trained generations of local leaders to promote future development.

At the same time, the agency is commissioned to strengthen the political and economic position of the United States in those same lands and to work with the U.S. military in times of war. Most of the time it serves as an instrument of American “soft power” whose effect, over the long haul, is to maintain and expand the American empire and to challenge the power of its Russian, Chinese, and other competitors.

That is why I’ve been criticizing USAID for so long – because I think that soft power in the service of empire leads eventually to hard power conflicts. But only a reckless political adventurer with more than a little sadism in his makeup would call USAID, as Musk did, a “criminal organization” and sentence it to “die.” It is America’s most important and effective humanitarian organization, and it spends virtually nothing compared with military and military-industrial expenditures. Musk and Trump have other motives for wanting the organization abolished or vastly reduced and absorbed by the State Department.

The first motive is the most primitive sort of nationalism, the sort that advocates enriching your own people – starting, of course, with those who are already rich – even at the cost of impoverishing other peoples. “Don’t give anything to the residents of other nations unless there is some immediate profit to be gained by yours.” This is basically the philosophy of Ebenezer Scrooge – but I’m sure that Musk and Trump consider Charles Dickens a far-left Marxist.

Second, Musk/Trump clearly want to punish public service workers and civil contractors for not being in private enterprise and to force them to seek private jobs. According to them, only profit-making work is “productive”; anyone working for or the government is “unproductive” and parasitic – except, of course, for those in the military and military-industrial sector, whose budgets are considered sacrosanct and beyond review. This is consistent with their underlying political strategy to divide working people into two classes and discriminate against those whose efforts have other goals than maximizing profits. Perhaps *this* is why Musk calls them “Marxists” – although his definition would make Adam Smith, the father of Capitalism, spin in his grave.

In any case, King Donald and Prince Elon (or do I have their titles reversed?) have begun to treat the thousands of people working in the field of foreign aid with the sort of cruel contempt that reflects their true feelings about all workers other than those wearing MAGA hats. “Let them get jobs in private business” = “Let them eat cake.” One can’t help wondering when those thousands now being thrown out of work by royal fiat will start marching in the direction of the Bastille.

FEBRUARY 4, 2025