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Democracy and Empire

You Are the Enemy!

by ROB URIE

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If NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden can find his way to political asylum in Venezuela, as current rumor has it, the local issue of an American democratic activist (Snowden) finding refuge in a democratic country is solved. But the larger problem of the citizens of the U.S. passively accepting the increasingly oppressive terms of empire remains. To the extent the peoples of South and Central America live in functioning democracies and we in the U.S. don't, this has come at the cost of a century or more of blood, expropriation and humiliation at the hands of American empire. While Mr. Snowden's refuge in Venezuela would serve as a potent symbol of the Venezuelan people's victory against the oil mafia (CIA) and America's political domination of South and Central America, at what point must Americans assume responsibility for our roles in the deprivations of empire?

For any who don't yet understand our (American) circumstance, part of the value of Mr. Snowden's disclosures is that the guardians of American empire increasingly see us, the American people, as 'others' from whom the social-historical construct 'America' must be protected. This has always been true in the social taxonomy by degree: indigenous peoples, kidnapped blacks forced into slavery, citizens of Japanese descent in WWII, and as reified history in current social relations. Self-defined 'true' Americans were those on the 'giving' end of empire. Marxists and nineteenth century populists even had clarity around the predator-prey

relations of unfettered capitalism before the collective amnesia of recent decades set in. And the marketers of empire, well fed on psychological techniques of coercion and control, have convinced many—perhaps a majority, corporate state strategies of domination and control are the best ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ will ever offer.

But that raises the question—democracy and freedom for whom? When we are asked what we think—which policies we favor, the answers are rarely aligned with official policies. Within the convenient (for whom?) boundary of nation, this serves the storyline of ‘out of touch’ government corrupted by ‘money in politics.’ But imagine away ‘nation’ and a different alignment appears—Venezuela is a functioning democracy because, to the extent possible, the same empire that now burdens us was cast off. When Glenn Greenwald reports the citizens of Brazil, and South America more broadly, are being spied on by and for American empire, how is it not also clear that we—Americans, are being spied on by and for empire? How is it not also clear, as the brave people of Venezuela concluded, this empire does not act in our interests? And not only does it not act in our interests, through lies, coercion, exploitative political-economic relations, and now through the technologies of surveillance, it is absolutely antagonistic to our interests.

American politics, following from the decades between the end of WWII and the mid-1970s, broadly aligned the interests of empire with those of the American people (again, by degree), if for no other reason than the rich realized they needed millions of poor and middle class youth to fight their wars. The radical left and militant blacks long saw the divergence of interests between empire and class / race within America. And the Pentagon Papers released in 1971 by ‘whistleblower’ Daniel Ellsberg brought to light the true views of the guardians of empire toward this divide. It was also made clear they saw American youth, just as they saw the rest of humanity, as so much canon fodder for their lunatic slaughters. Three and one half million Vietnamese murdered (Robert McNamara’s count), one million Iraqis, murderous fascist dictatorships throughout South and Central America— for ‘freedom?’ For ‘democracy?’ How can the American people continue to believe this when the guardians of empire are known to never have believed it?

The utter idiocy of the unfolding story of domestic spying creates a challenge for the anti-communists who grew up in communist countries and can read and write (and have had healthcare). Current President Barack Obama has deviated not one iota from the policies of empire of George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. Mr. Obama sees you and I as Ronald Reagan saw the good citizens of El Salvador and Nicaragua—pawns of empire un-magnified by the quantum of ‘democracy’ called money. Our sickness is our privilege—above indigenous villagers to be pillaged, raped and slaughtered, but in no substantial way above suppression, repression, exploitation, incarceration and the occasional murder. Mr. Obama’s bourgeois supporters, unable to differentiate state’s rights from gay rights, lies from actions, cynical posturing from policies, and now naked tyranny from ‘protection,’ nearly deserve what empire is in the process of delivering to them.

To paraphrase a saw from the Argentinean left, if Americans are given a choice of voting for Thomas Jefferson or Spiderman, they will choose Thomas Jefferson. If they are given a choice between Spiderman and Superman, what choice is there? The American delusion is the choice

between Spiderman and Superman when the true choice is between empire and realized existence—social participation and self-determination. In defense of empire Mr. Obama and the ‘security’ bureaucracy lie that the choice is between surveillance and terrorist violence. But any true reading of American history and Mr. Obama’s (and George W. Bush’s, etc.) actual policies has empire as the near sole proponent and executor of terrorist violence. The dividing line of ‘nation’ is used to sever the ties of humanity. ‘Our’ brothers and sisters are the murdered and terrorized wedding parties and villagers of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Bolivia, Venezuela, and on and on. And our enemy is the empire hiding behind the choice of Spiderman or Superman to ‘lead’ us to our own despair.

To be clear, the analogy of comic book heroes to the faux politics of empire captures the moronic caricatures of ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives,’ marketing terms for the competing patronage systems posing as ideological difference. As savior of the banks, the trough at which Mitt Romney feeds, President Barack Obama is Mitt Romney’s best friend in the world. And as icon of pirate capitalism, the economy of empire, and patron of the American lootocracy, Mitt Romney is Barack Obama’s best friend in the world. As professional poseurs in the service of empire, they fill the roles of faux competitors complete with developed threads of misdirection to propel the illusion of ‘difference’ with the depth of thought and character of comic book heroes. The role of ‘both’ Parties is to repel democracy under the illusion of competition. And Barack Obama is proving to be the most gifted illusionist in a generation.

At great personal sacrifice the peoples of Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba and many, many more nations have attempted, and in some cases succeeded, in casting off the yoke of empire to form living democracies. America’s declining bourgeois, still blind to its own circumstance; remains the major impediment to this spreading democratic revolution. The idiot partisans supporting Spiderman or Superman enthusiastically defend the delimitations handed them despite the overwhelming evidence they are being played for fools. Who really believes that Clarence Thomas and Condoleeza Rice are forces of liberation? Why then would President Barack Obama be, other than as expressed in his policies? And who then among those paying attention to his actual policies, as opposed to his descriptions of them, believes Mr. Obama is a force of liberation? And a politics without policies might be ‘Orwellian’ if the term weren’t too weak to describe the American farce.

The problem that remains for the forces of democracy and democratic revolution is this post-literate Western bourgeois is consumed with the idiot-choices handed it and is so aggressively immovable. When answering the question of why so many Venezuelans remained poor in an oil-rich nation the late President Hugo Chavez answered that the reach of empire remained formidable and providing education, healthcare and basic democratic rights to the poor and destitute served human dignity. For all of the purported ‘benefits’ of empire, it is clear the American bourgeois have contented themselves to exist on the other side of human dignity—without education, health care or democratic participation. Even the lauded ‘hard’ education of math and science is devoted to ‘algorithmic’ trading and other financial and medical fakery. It’s fine and well that the American bourgeois choose lives of artless subservience, but it is a problem for ‘the world’ when empire forces the choice on those who don’t want it.

To Democrat supporters finally disillusioned: we don't need better candidates— we need a fucking revolution. The side of human dignity is with America's victims, not with the murderous arrogance of the professional sociopaths of American empire who are their victimizers. The comic book heroes who pose as leaders can only fake the consent of 'the people' by lying about their policies. George W. Bush had to weave a web of fear-based illusion to get you to go along with his moronic catastrophe in Iraq. Barack Obama has done as much as Mr. Bush to trash the Constitution while engineering a corporate coup that rendered his calculated lie of restoring democracy its opposite. So why is the calculus of what is 'good for America' left in their hands? Representative democracy, always a paradox, depends on honest representation for legitimacy. How representative were Mr. Bush's lies about Iraq or Mr. Obama's lies about everything he's ever said? And how are the murders and deceits of American empire in 'our' interest? 'Nation' is the wall erected by empire between the people of America and our humanity.

The current con being perpetrated by the windbags of empire—Mrs. Bechtel Corporation (Democrat Senator Diane Feinstein) and President Barack Obama, is that domestic spying is somehow separate from the other machinery of repression. Any illusionist worth his or her salt can leave their fingerprints off of specific acts, but at what point does the pattern of repression implicate him / her? The NSA's techniques of domestic spying tie directly to the coordinated nation-wide repression of Occupy Wall Street and earlier movements of liberation including electronic spying, the use of informants, spreading disinformation, illegitimate detention of protesters by police, insinuations of the presence of 'agents provocateurs,' illegal arrests and violence. These strategies and techniques differ by degree, but not by intent, with those used against the democratically elected and democratically governing leaders of other nations around the world. And as anyone who compared the 'Western' narrative of the (failed) CIA orchestrated coup against Hugo Chavez with the facts must realize, undue concern with 'controlling the narrative' is self-repression in the service of empire because the corporate-state media will simply create whatever self-serving fiction is believed to be politically effective anyway.

I personally hope Mr. Snowden finds his way to Venezuela and lives a happy and prosperous life. But it is time we Americans stop dumping the detritus of empire on peoples who have, by degree, successfully fought for their right of self-determination against this very empire. It is encouraging that, given the power of the corporate-state frame; a majority of Americans believe Mr. Snowden to be a public servant (whistleblower) rather than a 'traitor.' The difference illustrates a growing understanding of the internal tension of empire against democracy. The next move of empire is for 'reformers' to step in to save the totalitarian apparatus under the guise of 'correcting its excesses.' And until life becomes a lot more uncomfortable for the bourgeois wasteland of the American left, 'reform' will likely serve its purpose of derailing change.

To be clear, this is no plea for Americans to 'do the right thing' by taking an international view of the unfolding democratic struggle against empire—'the world' knows better. For much of recent history Americans have 'benefited' from empire if trading life and community for baubles and artless drudgery are benefits. But what is so currently threatening to empire is that Edward Snowden, Bradley Manning, Julian Assange, Occupy Wall Street and numerous other social-political movements are living evidence of the desire for political-economic participation and self-determination.

What the ‘horizontalists’ (anarchists, libertarians) choose not to understand is that empire has no intention of relinquishing control—just look at the last century of America crushing ‘horizontal’ movements around the globe. What is clear from empire’s response to ‘whistleblowers’ and OWS is the absolute determination to crush democratic movements ‘at home.’ Regardless of how you see yourselves, what NSA spying demonstrates is that the corporate-state sees you as ‘the enemy.’ Americans need to get political to save their own asses. Joining the rest of the world in an epic of humanity would just be a ‘bonus.’