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Obama and the Legacy of American Capitalism

We Must Move Beyond Party Politics

by CHARLES SULLIVAN

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“You’re not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that you cannot face reality. Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or says It.”

–Malcolm X

I have been reading political commentary on Black Agenda Report (BAR) regularly of late. The site, which purveys a black leftist perspective, regularly excoriates President Obama, as well they should. BAR has become a trusted source in my quest to understand history and current events. This is the home of the real left, not the pseudo left that pervades the corporate airwaves masquerading as champions of equality. Here, no one is paying homage to Obama or calling him a liberal or progressive simply because he is a black democrat. No one is calling him a socialist, either. The political commentators at BAR hold Obama to the same standard to which they held George W. Bush and his fascist predecessors.

Most of the self-proclaimed liberals who castigated Bush and Cheney for their neoconservative policies are giving Obama, whose policies are no less regressive or extreme than those of his precursors, a free ride. This is because the president belongs to the Democratic Party, which continues to be associated with traditional liberalism in the minds of contemporary faux progressives and liberals, rather than the neoliberalism that defines its policies.

Those who continue to support Obama and his backsliding pro-corporate regime obviously have no conception about what classical liberalism and progressivism are. They are at least half a century behind the times.

Although I may lack the political acumen to concisely define terms such as liberalism, progressivism, and leftist, which are somewhat subjective anyway, it is apparent to me that neoliberalism, the form of liberalism that is actually practiced by today's Democratic Party, bears much in common with the neoconservatism that is associated with contemporary Republicans. There is nothing progressive about either ideology, and nothing in them that is beneficial to workers. To call Obama a liberal or a socialist, as so many people do, is beyond farcical. It strains one's credulity to the breaking point.

I distrust Barack Obama for the same reasons that I spurn George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, the Clintons, and any other war mongering capitalist. My criticism has nothing to do with race or gender. It stems from ideological differences, class conflict, and radically dissimilar values from the ruling clique.

Among some black folk, charges of racism are leveled against any white folks who criticize the black president in the same way that charges of anti-Semitism are used against anyone who is critical of Israel's Zionist policies of apartheid that, with the aid of the U.S., are being carried out against the Palestinians. This is not to deny the racism that is directed against the president. It is to philosophically and morally disassociate myself from any and all groups of white supremacists engaged in bigotry.

If a policy is morally reprehensible and unjust, just people have a moral obligation to criticize it, regardless of who is responsible for formulating and enacting such policies. Every socially conscious human being has an ethical responsibility to take action against criminal government or any corporation that is harming one's community, or for that matter, the planet.

From my perspective, BAR and WPFW's Jared Ball are ethically consistent and accurate in their critiques of Barack Obama and American capitalism. These venerable warriors are true leftists who do not compromise their principles for political expediency, cost them what it may.

The virtually defunct radical left was once a formidable and organized political force in the U.S. Today's leftists are treated like pariahs by the pseudo left and its neocon brethren. Radical leftists pose a viable threat to the established orthodoxy. Anyone who refuses to carry forth the performative role assigned to them by the dominant culture is a threat to those in power. As true combatants for justice, today's leftwing dissidents are worthy of being associated with iconic revolutionaries like Malcolm X, Fred Hampton, and Mumia Abu Jamal, all of whom happen to be black.

By contrast, Barack Obama, who mouths an endless stream of pseudo liberal platitudes, is an unabashed disciple of Milton Friedman and the market fundamentalism he revered. This identifies the president as a corporate fascist and thus a promoter of inequality. It allies him with America's ruling class. Obama and his supporters should not be identified in any way, shape or form with the *real* left. Whatever minutia one uses to differentiate between contemporary neoliberals and neoconservatives is akin to splitting hairs.

The Democratic Party and the Republican Party are not mortal enemies, as portrayed in the corporate media; they are in collusion against the world's working class and the poor. Together, they are raping and pillaging the Earth Mother and repressing workers through economic violence and imposed austerity. Like costumed wrestlers performing on television, the acrimony is not real; it is vitriolic political theater, an enthralling puppet show for diehard believers.

We must somehow move beyond party politics, beyond the simplicity of liberal versus conservative dichotomy, beyond left against right, and see things as they really are rather than as we wish them to be.

Voting doesn't change anything in a system flush with corporate money. The structures that put the money into politics cannot be used to extract it. Without proportional representation or corporate money, third parties are not a viable option in state and federal elections. They are just another distraction from reality, a mild form of symbolic protest. Voting for justice does nothing to actually attain it. Direct action directly applied to a problem offers the best hope for revolutionary change.

Conversely, political dualism keeps us fighting the wrong people. It has us believing in people and institutions that do not promote justice and do us harm. These institutions are not what they purport to be. They are at best a mirage; something that appears real but only exists in the mind of the beholder.

Belief in the American Dream and perverted systems of power as a means to justice provides a method for directing and cajoling the masses to do the bidding of the super-wealthy and all-powerful corporate state. Faith, hope, and belief in phony people and bogus institutions function as a form of mass hypnosis that keeps the people from organizing in class struggle against a common oppressor—the capitalist system.

Despite reams of contradictory historical evidence, most people in the U.S. continue to associate democracy with capitalism. It is reckless of us to allow anyone to use these terms interchangeably without contesting them at every opportunity. Let me be clear: Democracy is the antithesis of capitalism! But capitalism is the product the U.S. government, the Pentagon, and the commercial media are marketing to us as democracy. And thus the inequality gap, the disparity between rich and poor, is growing wider rather than shrinking.

The nemesis of all working people, regardless of where they live or their political affiliation, is capitalism and its linear, hierachal, male-dominated power structures. This is why we must have a truthful critique of capitalism and patriarchy and create alternatives that promote the public wellbeing above corporate profits. Many promising alternatives, such as Professor Richard Wolff's Worker Self-Directed Enterprise (<http://www.democracyatwork.info>), already exist.

When the richest and most powerful people on earth, the primary beneficiaries of capitalism, invest so many resources into demonizing and subverting the writings of one man—Karl Marx—and the various economic and philosophic alternatives to capitalism, inquisitive minds want to know why. There are elements of Marxism that makes the power elite quake in their shoes. This is what led me to read Marx years ago. I have been reading him ever since.

Marx has helped me to comprehend why capitalists fear and loathe him. Deep down, they know that he was right. If workers understood capitalism from a Marxist perspective, not one in ten thousand would voluntarily accept their performative role in this exploitative economic system. There would be widespread conflict and social upheaval. There would be global revolution. The power elite spends trillions of dollars to maintain the façade of capitalism as a manifestation of democracy. In fact, I would argue that nothing could be more opposed to democracy than American capitalism.

The key point to understand is that capitalism, a system based upon the ruthless exploitation and commodification of workers and the relentless rape of our Earth Mother, stifles and represses democracy. Capitalists abhor all forms of egalitarianism. Marx embraced them. The mere possibility of an empowered work force troubles the capitalist's sleep, as did the possibility of slave rebellion, albeit it small, distress the slaveholder.

Consider the vitriol, not to mention counter revolutionary forces that are levied against the alternatives to capitalism. What is their source? Who but wealthy capitalists fund America's propaganda apparatus? Working people in the U.S. are conditioned to reflexively recoil against ideas they do not understand. They are psychologically programmed to detest that which could potentially set them free. American workers are led to believe that economic servitude and wage slavery is freedom.

Why does a government that calls itself a democracy systemically spy on its citizens? Why does it punish its whistle blowers but materially reward the vilest white-collar criminals? Why is the majority of the U.S. budget spent on funding an insatiable war machine? Why do we raise classrooms of meat puppets rather than critical thinkers and political dissidents? It is all done for the benefit of capitalists at the expense of society.

It is by these means that capitalism survives and spreads like an aggressive malignancy to every organ of the planet. Furthermore, the majority of the wealth produced by labor is subverted to prop up the capitalist system and to indoctrinate and oppress the worker. To the detriment of us all, freethinking and critical analysis are discouraged and often reprimanded in academia and elsewhere. And thus hundreds of millions of human beings are transformed into herd animals that are led to slaughter in the military and the world's sweat shops. We celebrate our freedom and patriotism on our march to the scalding pots, singing "God Bless America." There is no fight in us. We go too quietly and too obediently into the good night of eternity.

Yet, despite everything and the repressive weight of history, Americans still have a propensity to believe in myths and fairy tales. Hope and faith in phony leaders and bogus institutions keep us servile and docile. Irrational faith requires nothing from us. Delusion has become the norm because too many of us are incapable of grappling with reality. We can and must do better than capitalism or we are doomed to an ignominious fate.