

Imperialist Parasitism and “Democracy”: Why So Many Liberals and Progressives Are Shameless Supporters of “Their” Imperialism

by Bob Avakian

March 2, 2022

In the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has been a not-so-remarkable but thoroughly revealing, and disgusting, display of American liberals and progressives mindlessly mouthing condemnation of Russian aggression in a way that is *thoroughly in line with the position and aims of the imperialist ruling class of this country (the “good old USA”), which by far holds the record for invasions and other acts of violent interference in other countries.*

Of course, this act of imperialist aggression by Russia deserves to be condemned. But especially for people residing in *this* country—which, again, by far holds the record for such acts of aggression—it is a matter of basic principle and profound importance *not* to be echoing the positions and serving the aims of “our” imperialists, and instead to be making very clear our opposition to the aims and actions of these (U.S.) imperialists, *who are using opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, not as a way of promoting “peace,” or “the right of nations to self-determination,” but as means of furthering U.S. imperialist interests, in opposition to the rival Russian imperialists.* So, in keeping with this crucial principle, any opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, particularly by people in *this* imperialist country, *should be accompanied by a clear and definite stand of also opposing the role of the U.S. in the world, including the wars it continually wages, and other ways it violently interferes in other countries.*

As I pointed out in a previous article, a stand in line with U.S. imperialism is often rationalized with the claim that invasions and similar acts by *this* country are different, because “we” are a “democracy” while

the rulers of Russia (or China) are anti-democratic “authoritarians.”¹ Never mind the fact that more than a few “allies” of the U.S., such as Turkey (a member of NATO), are certainly no less “anti-democratic.” And then there is Saudi Arabia, whose rulers enforce dark ages oppression of women, along with vicious exploitation of especially immigrant workers, and savage repression overall, and who—with backing, support, and armaments supplied by the U.S.—are responsible for carnage and suffering in Yemen that is far worse than what Russia has inflicted on Ukraine, as awful as that is.

And the role of these “allies” of the U.S., in relation to the maintenance of the U.S. empire *and* “stability” in the U.S. itself, is another thing which our liberals and progressives ignore (or are actually ignorant of).

Imperialism and Its Political, as Well as Economic, “Spoils”

Nearly forty years ago, in the book *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?* I quoted the following:

The platform of democracy in the imperialist countries (worm-eaten as it is) rests on fascist terror in the oppressed nations: the real guarantors of bourgeois democracy in the U.S. are not the constitutional scholar and Supreme Court justice, but the Brazilian torturer, the South African cop, and the Israeli pilot; the *true* defenders of the democratic tradition are not on the portraits in the halls of the Western capitols, but are Marcos, Mobutu, and the dozens of generals from Turkey to Taiwan, from South Korea to South America, all

put and maintained in power and backed up by the military force of the U.S. and its imperialist partners.²

Some of the mass murderers in other countries who today play such a crucial role in serving the interests of U.S. imperialism throughout the world, and in making possible the maintenance of bourgeois democracy in this country itself (worm-eaten as it is indeed), are the same as they were 40 years ago, and some are different—but the essential reality remains that *the “platform of democracy” in this country rests on fascist terror, along with ruthless exploitation, in the oppressed nations of the Third World (Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia).*

In a number of works of mine, and other materials on the website revcom.us—including important papers by Raymond Lotta—the economic “spoils” of “imperialist parasitism” are examined: the way that the predatory super-exploitation of billions of people, including more than 150 million children, throughout the world, and in particular the Third World, makes possible a certain “standard of living” and process of consumption for people in this country, even as these “spoils” are shared in an extremely unequal way.

What is also true—and also important to speak to—is the *political* dimension of this: the way that this imperialist plunder provides the material basis for a certain stability, at least in “normal times” in the imperialist “home country” (with the U.S. a prime example of this). This relative stability, in turn, makes it possible for the ruling class to allow a certain amount of dissent and political protest—so long as this remains within the confines of, or at least does not significantly threaten, the “law and order” that serves and enforces the fundamental interests of this ruling class.

At the same time, as sharply demonstrated in mass uprisings which *do* call into question that “law and order” and/or defy allegiance to the imperialist interests of this system—such as the mass outpouring against police terror in 2020, and urban rebellions and mass opposition to the Vietnam war in the 1960s—the rulers of this country will frequently respond to such opposition with severe repression and murderous retribution. For example, the city of Wilmington, in Biden’s home state of Delaware, was

placed under martial law for months during the 1960s upsurge against the oppression of Black people, and a number of members of the Black Panther Party, most prominently Fred Hampton, were murdered by police, along with many Black people taking part in urban uprisings in that period, while militant mass resistance against the Vietnam war and rebellions among middle class youth and students were in some cases subjected to a vicious, and at times murderous, response by police and National Guard troops.

It should never be forgotten, or overlooked, that the “law and order” that enforces this relative stability has included *the regular murder of Black people, as well as Latinos, by police*—resulting in the fact that **the number of Black people who have been killed by police in the years since 1960 is greater than the thousands of Black people who were lynched during the period of Jim Crow segregation and Ku Klux Klan terror, before the 1960s.** It should also not be overlooked that *the U.S. has the highest rate of mass incarceration of any country in the world, with Black people and Latinos particularly subjected to this mass incarceration.*

Still, fundamentally because of imperialist parasitism, there has been a *relative* stability within this country for most of the period since the U.S. emerged as the most powerful and prosperous imperialist country in the aftermath of World War 2, and this has allowed for a certain level of tolerance of dissent and protest, at least where this dissent and protest essentially “abides by the rules” of the imperialist order.

At the same time, to once again graphically illustrate “the other side of this picture”—a truly horrific expression of the reality which underlies this relative stability in the U.S. itself—as I have pointed to before, in the period of slightly more than 75 years since the end of World War 2, **because of the way the world is dominated by the system of capitalism-imperialism, at least 350 million children in the Third World have needlessly died because of starvation and preventable disease—a number greater than the entire population of this country!**³

This, in a very concentrated way, gives expression to the parasitic basis on which the relative stability in this imperialist country has been possible. Among

other things, this has facilitated the “peaceful transfer of power” from one section of the ruling class to another—until now, when one section of that ruling class, represented by the Republican Party, “no longer believes in or feels bound by what have been the ‘cohering norms’ of ‘democratic’ capitalist rule in this country.” In the recent major work where that point is made about the Republican Party (“Something Terrible, Or Something Truly Emancipating”) I have analyzed why these “cohering norms” are no longer holding as they have in the past, and how this situation can only be resolved by radical means of one kind or another—“either radically reactionary, murderously oppressive and destructive means or radically emancipating *revolutionary* means.”⁴

But what is important to speak to here is how, even as this has been interrupted by times of major upheaval—and even as this is being torn apart in a major way now—this relative stability during the period after World War 2, grounded in imperialist parasitism, has fostered and encouraged the illusion, particularly among more well-off sections of the population, that this country is not ruled on the basis of oppression and repression—an illusion that is especially, and often desperately, clung to by liberals and progressives.

Imperialist Parasitism and the Effects on (Different Sections of) the Middle Class

In *Breakthroughs*, I made the following observations regarding important insights by Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

One must not imagine, Marx writes, that the democratic intellectuals

are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them [the democratic intellectuals] representatives of the petite bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter [the shopkeepers] do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and

solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically.

The petit bourgeois democratic intellectuals (people in capitalist society whose social position and mode of life is based on working in the realm of ideas, of one kind or another) mainly tend to the “left” side of the bourgeois political spectrum (the “liberal” or “progressive” position), while much of the “shopkeeper” strata (or, in broader terms, the owners of small-scale means of production or distribution) will often incline to the right, even the extreme right, of this spectrum (although at least some small-scale entrepreneurs, as well as many in the “gig economy,” seem to be an exception to this). But what is true of both the shopkeepers (broadly understood) and the democratic intellectuals is that, spontaneously, they remain confined within the constricting limits of capitalist commodity relations and the corresponding conceptions of bourgeois right.⁵

Further light is shed on this in an important paper by Raymond Lotta:

A certain historical configuration of the U.S. middle class has shrunk. This middle class grew and to some degree thrived economically in the 1945-75 period. It encompassed and was centered on sections of better-paid and unionized workers in large-scale industry, craftsmen, small-business owners, lower managers, salaried public sector workers like teachers, and those in professions not requiring college or advanced degrees....

This middle class has seen its conditions deteriorate. There are *contradictory effects* of the loosening grip of the cohering myth of the American dream. Traditional expectations have been exploded. This is also part of the ground on which Trump fascism feeds....

At the same time, the economic forces working in this direction were also contributing to the growth of an upper end of the U.S. middle class. Concretely, imperialist globalization, technological change, and heightened financialization—and with this the evolution of many U.S. companies like IBM

and Dell from production to services over the last few decades—stimulated the *expansion of higher-income “domestic supply chain” service jobs*. Jobs like operations managers, computer programmers, etc.⁶

The “traditional middle class” represents, in broad terms, what Marx refers to with the metaphor of “shopkeepers”—which, as I have pointed out, tend to the right, even the extreme right, of the bourgeois political spectrum (with, however, many teachers, and some others, an exception to this). And those in the “upper end of the U.S. middle class”—or, more specifically, those working in “knowledge occupations”—generally tend to the “left” of that bourgeois political spectrum, constituting to a large extent the middle class liberals and progressives in this country. But what is noteworthy is that it is precisely the “left” of the *bourgeois political spectrum*—that is, the “left” of politics *defined and delimited by the capitalist-imperialist system*—to which these liberals and progressives spontaneously incline. This, again, is a politics that is ultimately grounded in and reliant on the parasitism of the capitalist-imperialist system of this country and its position in the world. And this goes a long way in explaining why so many liberals and progressives in this country are shameless supporters of “their” imperialism—and why, particularly now, so many are falling in line with the utterly hypocritical stance of the representatives and mouthpieces of the U.S. imperialist ruling class in self-righteously denouncing the actions of Russian imperialism in invading Ukraine—actions of imperialist aggression which the imperialists of the USA have carried out on a scale far beyond any other country.

To shake these liberals and progressives, or at least significant numbers of them, out of their despicable stand in support of “their imperialism” will require fierce and relentless ideological struggle, to force them to confront the reality of what this imperialism actually represents and what it actually does in the world. And, more than that, it will require bringing forward a powerful revolutionary movement, aiming for nothing less than overthrowing this system and

replacing it with a radically different, emancipating system—a revolutionary movement that is based, not only but mainly, among masses of people who have far less of a stake in the “fortunes” of this parasitic system, whose conditions of brutal oppression under this capitalist-imperialist system far outweigh any “spoils” they might receive from its worldwide plunder.

With all this, it is crucial to recognize, and act on the recognition, that the situation in this country, and the world as whole, which is already very intense and is continually intensifying, indeed poses the prospect of something terrible—but *also something truly emancipating*: an actual revolution, right in this country, which will break the hold of powerful capitalist-imperialist oppressors over masses of people, weakening the death grip of this system far beyond the borders of this country, sending shockwaves of positive revolutionary inspiration throughout a world that is today still dominated by capitalism-imperialism, with all the horrors this involves.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Shameless American Chauvinism: “Anti-Authoritarianism” as a “Cover” For Supporting U.S. Imperialism*. This article by Bob Avakian is available at revcom.us.
2. Bob Avakian, *Democracy: Can’t We Do Better Than That?*, Banner Press, 1986. Information about ordering this book can be found at BA’s Collected Works at revcom.us. The quote is from Lenny Wolff, *The Science of Revolution*.
3. Bob Avakian cites this fact in the article *In Light of the Urgency Spoken to in “Something Terrible, Or Something Truly Emancipating,” A Renewed Challenge: Searching For An Honest Liberal Or Progressive*, which is available at revcom.us.
4. *Something Terrible, Or Something Truly Emancipating: Profound Crisis, Deepening Divisions, The Looming Possibility Of Civil War—And the Revolution That Is Urgently Needed, A Necessary Foundation, A Basic Roadmap For This Revolution*. This major work by Bob Avakian is available at revcom.us.
5. Bob Avakian, *Breakthroughs, The Historic Breakthrough by Marx, and the Further Breakthrough with the New Communism, A Basic Summary* is also available at revcom.us.
6. *Imperialist Parasitism and Class-Social Recomposition in the U.S. From the 1970s to Today: An Exploration of Trends and Changes* (emphasis in original). This paper by Raymond Lotta is also available at revcom.us.

Follow

[@TheRevcoms](https://www.instagram.com/therevcoms)

Read

Revcom.us

Watch

[Youtube.com/TheRevcoms](https://www.youtube.com/therevcoms)