

Individualism, BEB and the Illusion of "Painless Progress"

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BOB AVAKIAN

The relation between the struggle against this fascist regime and building the revolution is not a “straight road” or a “one-way street”: It must not be approached, by those who understand the need for revolution, as if “first we must build a mass movement to drive out this regime, and then we can turn our attention to working directly for revolution.” No. It is crucial to unite and mobilize people, from different perspectives, very broadly, around the demand that this regime must go, but it will be much more difficult to do this on the scale and with the determination that is required to meet this objective if there are not, at the same time, greater and greater numbers of people who have been brought forward around the understanding that it is necessary to put an end not only to this regime but to *the system out of whose deep and defining contradictions this regime has arisen*, a system which by its very nature has imposed, and will continue to impose, horrific and completely unnecessary suffering on the masses of humanity, until this system itself is abolished. And the more that people *are* brought forward to be consciously, actively working for revolution, the growing strength and “moral authority” of this revolutionary force will in turn strengthen the resolve of growing numbers of people to drive out this fascist regime now in power, even as many will not be (and some will perhaps never be) won to revolution.

side doesn't know which bathroom to use. Again, it's not that the question of bathroom use and the larger questions it encapsulates is unimportant. It is important. But there's a larger picture here of this developing trend or motion toward a civil war which right now is very one-sided in a very bad way, and if things continue on this trajectory the outcome could truly be disastrous.

So that should be serious food for thought—and not only that, but also a serious spur to action for people who do care about all the various ways in which people are being brought under attack and oppression is being intensified all across the board against large sections of the people who need to be brought together to fight against the offensive from these fascist forces—and, in more fundamental terms, need to be brought forward on the basis of recognizing that it's the whole system, out of which this fascist phenomenon has arisen, and which embodies such terrible oppression of people not just here but all around the world, that needs to be swept away.

Now, another element of this that we can't overlook is that, while a lot of what King describes applies in a certain demented way, particularly to progressive or so-called “woke” middle class people, there is another kind of problem with regard to more basic oppressed people, and in particular the youth—a big problem that their guns are now aimed at each other. And without going more fully into this right now, this is something that needs to be radically transformed in building a movement for an actual revolution.

So here we come to the question of the relation between building for an actual revolution and the still very urgent question of driving out this fascist regime. The following from Part 2 of *Why We Need An Actual Revolution And How We Can Really Make Revolution* remains extremely relevant and important:

The following is taken from a recent talk given by
Bob Avakian

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All this—even the seemingly more “benign,” or oblivious, individualism—links up with the repeated and stubborn insistence on chasing after the *illusion of painless progress*. If something makes people uncomfortable—and still more, if it holds out the prospect of sacrifice, necessary sacrifice, on their part—far too many people turn away from it. As I've pointed out before, there's this whole attitude of approaching reality as if it's a “buffet,” or approaching it like a consumer: “Well, that makes me uncomfortable. I'll just leave that to the side. I don't want to look at that because that makes me uncomfortable.”

I am going to talk later about some of the more ridiculous and outrageous forms of this. But just to give a little preview, as I pointed out in *The New Communism*, some people went on one of the college campuses a couple of years ago with a poster of Stolen Lives, people who'd been killed by police (not all of them, by any means, but dozens), and someone came up and started whining: “I don't like that poster, it makes me feel unsafe.”

As I commented at the time: Oh, boo-hoo! Let’s get out of this boo-hoo shit and start talking about and engaging seriously what’s happening to masses of people, one significant part of which is represented by what’s on that poster.

One of the most common and problematical forms of this repeated and stubborn insistence on chasing after the illusion of “painless progress,” particularly among people who consider themselves somewhat enlightened (or progressive, or “woke,” or however they want to put it), is what we very rightly term BEB—Bourgeois Electoral Bullshit—and the phenomenon that people continually confine themselves to the narrow limits of what is presented to them by one section of the ruling class, as embodied in the Democratic Party: “These are the limits of what I’ll consider in terms of possibly bringing about change”—because this is the well-worn rut of what is, at least up to this point, relatively safe in terms of political engagement. It may even become not-so-safe in the future, depending on how things go with these fascists who are working to consolidate their power right now through the ruling regime of Trump and Pence. But for now it seems relatively painless. It is also completely ineffectual and doesn’t bring about any kind of change that’s needed, but it’s a way to feel that you’re doing something while avoiding any sacrifice, and even any real discomfort.

One of the ways this gets expressed, along with the BEB, is people, in their masses, not confronting the reality of Trump/Pence fascism, and therefore not acting in a way commensurate with the danger and the potentially even greater horrors this represents.

Just to step back, and to speak to a very important element of this that I’ve touched on before, Trump’s election—through the electoral college, not the popular vote—is, in a real sense, an extension of slavery: the people who voted for Trump are the kind of people who would have been pro-slavery, had they been

women and others, there are real limitations and problems with the spontaneous outlook prevailing among those on the correct side of the divide. There is a narrowness along lines of “identity,” and an ignoring of, or a not paying sufficient attention to, the larger dynamics that are shaping up in the society (and the world) as a whole, and the implications of this, as represented, once again, by the fact that, while people are fighting around or raising some resistance around this or that particular instance of oppression, discrimination and prejudice, they are not rallying to take on the whole massive assault that’s embodied in the Trump/Pence regime, let alone the whole system that has produced this regime. There is the serious problem that, as a whole, people who consider themselves “progressive” or “woke” have, to put it mildly, not made any real rupture with American chauvinism (about which I will have more to say shortly). And, related to this, there is the fundamental problem of attempting to resolve the conflict with what is represented by the Trump/Pence regime and its fascist “base,” with its “8 trillion bullets,” through relying on (or seeking a return to) what have been the “norms” of the bourgeois order in this country (and, on the part of some, this involves a call for “restoring civility”) while the fascists are determined to trample on and tear up these “norms” and are perfectly happy to have those who oppose them adopt the stance of “civility” (accommodation) toward their unrelenting fascist offensive. Although this does not apply absolutely, it is far too much the case that the words of the poet William Butler Yeats describe this very serious situation: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity.” And so, while things could be heading toward a civil war, and it could come down to that even in the not-too-distant future, the present lineup is very unfavorable for anybody who represents anything decent in the world.

All this is, in a demented kind of way, represented in King’s statement that one side has about 8 trillion bullets while the other

can allow. And they don't want the confrontation between those people and the fascists who have rallied behind Trump. You think they want to see masses of Black people, immigrants, and others, including masses of people from different strata who are furious over Trump—you think they want to see them in the streets in direct and determined opposition to what is represented by Trump and Pence? That's one of the worst nightmares of Piglosi and Company, not only because of the potential for militant confrontation with the fascists, but because people could then get completely out of the control of the Democratic Party, and the whole system of which the Democrats are representatives, functionaries, and enforcers. A big part of what they are representing and enforcing would be seriously jeopardized.

So this is what's really going on with Piglosi and the rest in stubbornly resisting a move toward impeachment.

And then we come to one of the main aggressively fascist functionaries in the Republican Party, the Congressman from Iowa, Steve King. Recently, along with all of his other outrageous postings and overtly racist, misogynist, and crudely derogatory statements about Muslims and immigrants, and so on, King recently posted a meme, with this comment, on his official campaign page:

Folks keep talking about another civil war. One side has about 8 trillion bullets, while the other side doesn't know which bathroom to use.

Now, it has to be said that there is a “demented insight” in this comment. Obviously, this is a vicious attack on trans people, as well as those supportive of their rights. So, on the one hand, this is an outrageous statement, a thoroughly reactionary and vicious statement. But it does express a certain demented insight, or a demented representation of some truth, because while people are rightly supporting the rights of trans people, gay people,

around at the time of slavery in the United States. And those who find it acceptable to have the overt white supremacist Trump in the White House are the kind of people who would have ignored or would have openly accepted and justified or rationalized slavery when it existed. And here I have to invoke what I thought was a very insightful comment by Ron Reagan (yes, Ronald Reagan's maverick son, who is also, to his great credit, an unabashed atheist): Trump's much-analyzed, over-analyzed, “base” will continue supporting him, no matter what he does, Ron Reagan has pointed out (and this is very insightful), *because Trump hates all the same people they hate*.

As opposed to all the obfuscation about the economic difficulties people are going through, blah, blah, blah, that is often used to rationalize why people voted for and continue to support Trump, what Ron Reagan has sharply pointed to is the essence of Trump's “base.” And, by the way, notice how all the mainstream media, CNN and so on, continually use this term: Trump's “base.” This is a neutral term, “base.” These are a bunch of fascists, okay? And by using these euphemisms, or these neutral terms, like “base,” you're obscuring and keeping people from seeing what is actually represented by Trump and those who support him, and the depth of the real danger this poses. Ron Reagan's comment is very much to the point. He went on to elaborate: They hate LGBT people, they hate women (independent women, and really all women), they hate Black people, they hate immigrants, they hate Muslims, and so on. And Trump hates all the same people they hate.

That is why they'll never desert him, whatever he does. That is why he could very rightly make the comment: “I could shoot somebody on Fifth Avenue in New York City and these people wouldn't turn against me.”

At the same time, it has to be bluntly said: For the millions, and tens of millions, who say they hate everything Trump stands for and what he is doing but who, after all this time, have still not taken to the streets in sustained mobilization demanding that the Trump/Pence regime must go, this makes them *collaborators* with this fascist regime and themselves guilty of the egregious crime of tolerating this regime when they still could have the possibility of achieving the demand that it must go, through such mass mobilization!

To paraphrase Paul Simon: They are squandering their resistance for a pocketful of mumbles—and worse—from the Democratic Party.

It is long past time—and there is still time, but not much time—for this to change, for masses of people to finally take to the streets, and stay in the streets, with the firm resolve that this fascist regime must go!

And here are some very relevant questions for the millions and tens of millions who hate everything Trump stands for but have failed or refused to mobilize, in their masses, in non-violent but sustained action around the demand that the Trump/Pence regime be removed from power, as has been called for by Refuse Fascism: If you will not take to the streets now to demand that the Trump/Pence regime must go, what will you do if Trump is re-elected (perhaps through the electoral college, even if he again loses the popular vote)? And what will you do if Trump loses the election (even by the electoral college count) but then refuses to recognize the results and insists he is still President?!

At the same time, it is necessary to point to the very serious problems with the dangerous naiveté and “left” posturing of certain “progressive” intellectuals. For example, someone like Glenn Greenwald, who has done some good things in exposing the

therefore we shouldn’t try to impeach him.” This is the logic of what they’re saying, even if they don’t directly and explicitly articulate it like that. So they’re letting the Republicans set the terms—which, of course, only causes the Republicans to be even more aggressive in pursuit of their agenda and in defying and trampling on the “norms” of this system. Even according to their own bourgeois “principles,” the Democrats should be acting on the basis of what’s in their Constitution, not according to what the Republicans will allow them to do.

Secondly, along with being afraid of Trump and the Republican Party, they *are* afraid of the reality that laws don’t enforce themselves. They’re afraid that if they impeach Trump—and if, somehow, they even succeeded not only in impeaching him, but actually getting him convicted in the Senate—that Trump might well declare: “Fuck you, I’m the President, I don’t recognize this impeachment.” Then, what and whom can they turn to? This brings up the other dimension of this second point: They’re afraid of Trump’s “base.” They’re afraid of these fascist forces out there who are being encouraged and goaded by Trump to increasingly act in a violent manner and who (as I’ll speak to shortly) do have a lot of weapons and are demonstrating not only their willingness, but their eagerness, to use them. So Piglosi and the rest are afraid of that.

But at least as much—and here is the “third fear”—they are afraid of the people on the other side of the divide in the country, the people who tend to vote for the Democrats, especially the basic masses of oppressed people. They are afraid of the very people, basic masses and others, whom the Democratic Party is responsible for “corralling” into the BEB and “domesticating” their dissent. They’re afraid of the people who are angry about what’s represented by Trump and Pence. They don’t want those people out in the street, unless it is contained within the narrow confines of what the Democratic Party, and the system it serves,

“We shouldn’t impeach Trump because that will just serve him; he’s trying to goad us into impeaching him.” As though it would not be a good thing for Trump to be impeached. Piglosi insists: “We’re not gonna fall for that, we’re gonna hold Trump accountable.” Oh yeah? How? How are you going to hold him accountable when you refuse to use one of the most powerful instruments you have, impeachment, to actually do something meaningful to oppose what he’s doing?

I saw a commentator on one of the networks the other day who made an observation which (along with and despite a bunch of nonsense that she was also spouting) was actually somewhat insightful and important. She said: “Laws don’t enforce themselves. If you can do something and get away with it, the law is meaningless.” Well, Piglosi, your “accountability” (holding Trump “accountable”) is meaningless because you are refusing to exercise the most effective means you *might* have to “hold him accountable.”

Now, some people say that this is just being done by Piglosi and the rest because they have the 2020 election in mind, and they don’t want to feed the Republican Party ammunition for their insistence that “this is a witch hunt” against Trump and the Republican Party. That may be a secondary consideration on the part of the Democrats, but if you listen to Piglosi she’s telling us what the deal actually is. She’s saying it would further divide the country to impeach Trump—as if the “country” is not already very deeply and very intensely divided, at this point, which is precisely why someone like Trump could get elected in the first place.

But there are really three reasons, or we could call them “three fears,” that Piglosi and the rest have. They’re afraid of Trump and the Republicans, so they’re allowing Trump and the Republicans to set the terms of what they can do. Their “logic” goes like this: “Since Trump would lash back if we tried to impeach him,

violations of people’s rights under this system—human rights, civil rights and civil liberties—but who, whenever anything’s brought out about the terrible crimes and horrors that are represented by the Trump/Pence regime, insists upon immediately saying things like, “Yes, but what about Hillary Clinton, and what about the Democrats, and the terrible things they have done?” All of which is true. As we have pointed out: The Democratic Party is a machine of massive war crimes and crimes against humanity. And this does need to be brought out. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that the Republican Party is fascist, and if you don’t understand that this has real meaning and real importance—and every time someone speaks to the outrages and horrors perpetrated by these fascists, you insist on immediately raising, “Yes, but what about the Democrats?”—you’re leading people, or pointing people, away from an understanding of the real dynamics going on here and the real dangers.

And then there is Slavoj Žižek. As is very bluntly, and very accurately, put in the article by Raymond Lotta, “Slavoj Žižek Is a Puffed-Up Idiot Who Does Great Damage”:

Slavoj Žižek, an influential fool-of-a-philosopher who often poses as a “communist,” declared his support for Donald Trump on British TV. A victory for Trump, according to Žižek, will help the Republicans and Democrats “rethink themselves”—and could bring about “a kind of big awakening.” And speaking from his “what-me-worry” perch [Lotta goes on], Žižek pronounced that Trump “will not introduce fascism.”

As Lotta then succinctly states: “This is wrong, this is poison.” And it is similar to the kind of wrong and dangerous thinking that people like Glenn Greenwald fall into and propagate. Similarly to Glenn Greenwald, it involves playing down the actual reality and danger of what’s represented by fascism, even as, once again, the

Democratic Party is an instrument of bourgeois dictatorship, and a machine of massive war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This kind of wrong thinking is also exemplified by someone like Julian Assange, who actually, from all appearances, and it does seem to be the case, contributed to the machinations that went on around the Trump campaign, involving, it does seem, the Russians in this, and who did so with the same kind of rationalization that Žižek put forward, as cited by Raymond Lotta—that Clinton and the Democratic Party represent the old establishment, the old ways of doing things, and if they’re defeated and somebody who’s outside the establishment gets in, it will shake things up. I have heard Assange saying (his own words, not just others characterizing what his position is): “Maybe this will lead to a negative change, or maybe it will lead to a positive change, but at least it will lead to change, or it will hold open the possibility of change.”

Well, *what kind* of change is it actually leading to? There’s no room for agnosticism or ignorance about what kind of change it is leading to. Yes, bourgeois dictatorship in any form is very bad for the masses of people, very oppressive and repressive of the masses of people, and needs to be overthrown. But an overt fascist dictatorship that tramples on any pretense of upholding rights for people is not something that should be put in the category of “maybe it’ll be a positive change, or maybe it’ll be a negative change.”

Now, at the same time as making this sharp critique, particularly with regard to Julian Assange, it is very important to emphasize the need to oppose the persecution of Assange by the U.S. imperialists, whose persecution of him is in response to and revenge for his part—not in something to do with the Russians, but overwhelmingly in exposing just some of the monstrous crimes of this system. In this regard, there was an

and right up to the present, carried out under Republican *and* Democratic administrations. Here is the challenge: Go read that “American Crime” series and then come back and try to explain why it’s a decent thing to do to be caught up in supporting the Democrats.

Along with its other crimes, and its particular role in maintaining and enforcing this system, in the current circumstances the Democratic Party is also an *active facilitator of fascism* because of its refusal, even on the terms of the system it represents, to do anything meaningful to oppose the fascism of the Trump/Pence regime. This is concentrated in the insistence by Democratic Party leader Nancy Pelosi (or Piglosi, as she should be called) that impeachment is, once again, off the table. Some people may not remember (or may have chosen to forget), and others may not even know, but there was a massive sentiment to impeach George W. Bush back around 2005-2006, in particular because of the way he took the country to war, attacking and invading Iraq, causing massive destruction and death in that country, on the basis of systematic lies that were very consciously perpetrated by his whole regime, including Colin Powell, Cheney and Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and the rest, who deliberately and systematically lied about Iraq having weapons of mass destruction and supposedly threatening the U.S. (and “allies” of the U.S.) with those weapons. These lies were the rationalization for perpetrating the U.S. war of aggression against Iraq—which, in fact, was an international war crime. There was a mass sentiment toward impeachment of George W. Bush largely on that basis. Well, when the Democrats, in the 2006 election, won control of both houses of Congress, immediately Nancy Piglosi said impeachment is off the table. And now she’s doing the same thing again—and she’s doing this not just as an individual, but as representative of the leadership of the Democratic Party. To borrow a term from the gang scene, the “shot-callers” of the Democratic Party are saying:

of humanity and embodies an existential threat to the very future of humanity; and, on the other hand, the fact that (to paraphrase what is cited above from Krugman’s article) there is a very real difference and very direct danger embodied in the fact that one of these ruling class parties (the Republicans) openly abandons much of the pretense of being anything other than a rapacious, and yes racist, plunderer of human beings and of the environment. This requires the correct synthesis of, in fundamental terms, opposing the whole system, of which both of these parties are instruments, and actively working, in an ongoing way, toward the strategic goal of abolishing this whole system, while also, with the same fundamental strategic perspective, recognizing the acute immediate danger posed by the fascist Trump/Pence regime and working urgently to bring forward masses of people in non-violent but sustained mobilization around the demand that this regime must go!

Failing to really recognize and act on this understanding, in its different aspects and its full dimension, is very much related to individualism—particularly in the form of seeking the illusion of painless progress, rather than being willing to confront inconvenient and uncomfortable truths and to act accordingly, even with the sacrifices that might be required.

With all the nuances and particularities of contradictions that do have to be recognized, this crucial truth can be put in this basic and concentrated way:

The Democratic Party Is Part of the *Problem*, Not the Solution.

Here a challenge needs to be issued to all those who insist on the position that “the Democrats are the only realistic alternative”: On the website revcom.us, there is the “American Crime” series, which chronicles and outlines many of the most horrific crimes of the U.S. ruling class, going back to the beginning of this country

interesting article called “Julian Assange and the Woeful State of Whistle-Blowers” by Edward Wasserman, who’s a professor of journalism and the Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley. (This article appeared in the *New York Times* on Saturday, April 27 of this year, 2019.) Wasserman points out that, with whatever his failings are, political and personal, Julian Assange, through WikiLeaks, “enabled spectacular disclosure of official secrets,” including, as Wasserman himself puts it, “war crimes, torture and atrocities on civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan” by the U.S. And this is why he’s being attacked in the legal arena and politically by the U.S. ruling class. This dimension is where people need to rally to Assange’s defense, even with his limitations and failings. And the need and importance of defending Assange, particularly from political/legal persecution by the U.S. government, has been greatly heightened by the fact that this government (headed by the Trump/Pence fascist regime) has now piled on very serious charges of *espionage* in this process of persecution, with dire implications not just for Assange but for any and all who would dare to uncover and expose the war crimes and crimes against humanity continually carried out by U.S. imperialism and its institutions of violence and repression.

Yet, without in any way failing to give due importance and emphasis to opposing these repressive moves by the U.S. government, it remains necessary and there is also great importance to criticizing this outlook and approach embodied in the thinking of people like Assange and Glenn Greenwald, as well as Žižek. The idea that these bourgeois (or “establishment”) politicians are just “all the same,” without any analysis of the nuances, or even the blatant differences, between them and the consequences of this for the masses of people, the masses of humanity—this is very harmful.

Here it is worth looking at the criticism that was raised of the German communists in the period of the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s. The slogan was attributed to the German communists: “Nach Hitler, Uns,” (meaning: “After Hitler, Us”). In other words, the same kind of thinking—that Hitler actually heading up the government would shake up things and would cause such a crisis in society that, then, the communists would have a chance to come to power. This represented a very serious underestimation of what was represented by Hitler and the Nazis, and the terrible consequences of this for humanity. Yes, the communists there should have been consistently and firmly opposing the whole system on a revolutionary basis, but it was also very important and necessary to recognize that Hitler and the Nazis were a particularly perverse and extreme representation of all the horrors of this system, and would carry them out in very extreme forms.

So, in relation to all this, there is a need for a scientific approach to building opposition to the fascism embodied in the Trump/Pence regime in the U.S. today, in a way that is based on and proceeds from the understanding that’s captured in works of mine like “The Fascists and the Destruction of the ‘Weimar Republic’... And What Will Replace It” and “Not Being Jerry Rubin, or Even Dimitrov, but Actually Being Revolutionary Communists: THE CHALLENGE OF DEFENDING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS—FROM A COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE, AND NO OTHER.” (These articles are available at revcom.us. They are part of the Collected Works of Bob Avakian.)

As I have stressed several times, and as concentrated in the slogan we have brought forward: “The Republican Party is Fascist, The Democratic Party is *Also* a Machine of Massive War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity.” This emphasizes the importance of both aspects of things: recognizing the particularity of what’s represented by the fascism of the Trump/Pence regime and

the Republican Party as a whole, and confronting the nature and massive crimes of the whole system, and all those who are functionaries and enforcers of this system, definitely including the Democratic Party.

In an article in the *New York Times* (Tuesday, July 16, 2019), “Racism Comes Out of the Closet,” Paul Krugman makes the point that not just Donald Trump but the Republican Party as a whole has gone from “dog whistling” racism to overtly and crudely expressing it. Krugman concludes this article this way, referring to the Republican Party’s dropping of even any pretense of opposing racism:

It’s tempting to say that Republican claims to support racial equality were always hypocritical; it’s even tempting to welcome the move from dog whistles to open racism. But if hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue, what we’re seeing now is a party that no longer feels the need to pay that tribute. And that’s deeply frightening.

Krugman does have a point—an important and relevant point—here, as far as it goes. The problem is that it doesn’t go far enough, and in particular does not break out of the constricting terms of contradictions and conflicts among ruling class parties (the Republicans and the Democrats). The stance of hypocritically pretending opposition to such outrages as racist oppression, while in fact acting as the representatives, functionaries and enforcers of a system that has this oppression built into it and could not exist without this oppression—this does not just apply to the Republican Party in the past (if it ever applied to that party at all over the past 50 years and more) but also applies to the Democratic Party. What is concentrated in this situation is the need to recognize, and correctly handle, a very real and acute contradiction: the fact that, on the one hand, the Democratic Party, as much as the Republican Party, is a party of a system that continually commits, and cannot help committing, massive crimes against the masses