

Toronto Star's Heather Mallick endorses "murderer" Obama

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In a May 14 column in the *Toronto Star* described "socialist" writer Heather Mallick provided readers with another example of the bankruptcy of identity politics. Entitling her article "From anti-gay bullying to would-be president", Mallick explains that given a choice in the US presidential election between Republican contender Mitt Romney and drone strike "murderer" (in her words) President Barack Obama, she would choose the latter.

Mallick takes as her starting point the revelation last week that Romney, as a teen-ager, led a group of prep school students in a bullying attack on a fellow student they perceived to be gay. Romney and his friends jumped the victim, held him down and sheared off some of his hair. She then compares the Republican politician's actions and character with those of Obama:

"Lost in the question of bullying", she writes, "it's easy to forget that Obama killed an American citizen, Anwar Al-Awlaki, and his teen-age son in an illegal drone strike, which does technically make him a murderer even if he won't be charged. On the other hand you completely know that young Obama would never hound, pound and cut a terrified classmate. The bully or the murderer, make your choice ... I'll take Obama the murderer", she concludes, "Yes, I will".

What can one say?

Mallick, who has also written for Canada's *Globe and Mail*, the *New York Times* and Britain's *Guardian*, has been a principal voice of left-liberalism in Canada for years. She was a gushing supporter of Obama in 2008—although her enthusiasm somewhat waned when the new president appointed only men to key posts

overseeing the bank bailout and, lacking "spine", subsequently squandered his majority in congress and abandoned his so-called progressive agenda. But neither this nor the record of Obama in the "war on terror" is sufficient to drive Mallick from the Democratic president's fold.

As Mallick indicates, last fall, Obama ordered the killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen, in a drone attack in Yemen. Another American citizen, Samir Khan, was killed in the same attack. Two weeks later, Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman, was killed in a subsequent US drone strike.

Drones have become infamous the world over as instruments of US military aggression and assassination. Their use has expanded exponentially over the last decade. In 2001, the American military arsenal included barely 50 drones. Now, it has a fleet of some 7,500. Drone strikes have dramatically escalated during the Obama administration. They have claimed nearly 2,700 victims since 2004, the great majority of them unarmed men, women and children.

From the maintenance of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp to the defense of torture, rendition, indefinite detention, domestic spying, secret prisons and state secrets, Obama has deepened the far-reaching attack on democratic rights and processes launched by his predecessor, George W. Bush. He has gone beyond Bush in ordering the assassination of US citizens and asserting his right to do so.

But none of this holds up when compared with the youthful sins of the bully, Mitt Romney. After all, as we have been told in numerous other columns by

Mallick, the Republican Party—and their Conservative brethren in Canada—is simply a repository for old, fat white men with sexual inadequacies and “trailer trash” [Sarah Palin].

There is certainly nothing to recommend the positions of big business politician Romney—he too supports the drone assassinations—but here one should note Mallick’s penchant for adopting the unprincipled tactics of far right commentators. Her (and their) *modus operandi* of often half-baked, personal invective and a barely concealed disdain for wide layers of the population has earned her not only the enmity of right-wing pundits, but snickering approval from a layer of liberal readers.

The dilettante Mallick has made a virtue of a certain cynical, light-minded, satirical writing style that she hopes will insulate her from the rigours of journalistic accountability. She prefers to “generally take light things seriously and serious things lightly and that way you get some bendings in your life rather than just sitting up in horror”. That horror, however, also has a silver lining. “The worse things are”, she once said, “the happier I am because it matches my world-view”. Meanwhile the well-heeled Mallick revels in shopping sprees and regular trips to Paris to sample the fine dining there.

Mallick has spent much of her career promoting issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. For such figures, this is a means of obscuring the basic class questions in society and diverting attention from the reactionary policies of “progressive” parties on every front. In doing so, she seeks to exploit the general support for equality and the expansion of women’s and gay rights, particularly among young people.

The Democratic Party in the United States and the social-democratic NDP in Canada use such issues in the attempt to establish points of difference with their more right-wing opponents, and thus win support in more affluent layers of the middle class, under conditions in which the mainstream political parties agree on all fundamental issues.

The net result of decades of identity politics has been

the emergence of privileged layers from within each oppressed group, whose role is to keep expressions of misery and anger from the less fortunate within acceptable bounds. Obama himself is a prime example of the opportunities for personal advancement.

Mallick doesn’t see the systemic attacks on the working class or imperialist interventions as part and parcel of the profit system. Rather, like some Victorian-era philanthropist, what she wants is just some “social justice and my taxes to help the poor”.

This has nothing to do with any socialist tradition. A Marxist such as Rosa Luxemburg understood that the “lack of rights for women (and other minorities) is only one link in the chain of the reaction that shackles the people’s lives”. Socialists have viewed the struggle for those rights as part of the effort to unite and strengthen the entire working population and raise it to the level of its historic task, settling accounts with capitalism.

There is nothing progressive about the purveyors of identity politics. They run interference for those even further to their right. The only question is, how far will they go? In her *Toronto Star* piece, Mallick has given us another clue. She’ll take a murderer.



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