

Obama glorifies militarism on the Fourth of July

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In Fourth of July remarks delivered in a brief radio/Internet address and repeated to a military audience on the White House lawn, President Obama hailed the US armed forces, the most powerful instrument of violence on the planet, as the bearer of freedom to the world.

There was a yawning contradiction in the White House celebration. Obama was compelled to give lip service to the events associated with July 4, 1776, one of the landmarks in mankind's ongoing struggle against tyranny and oppression. Yet the US president himself personifies modern tyranny, the domination of the world by a new aristocracy of wealth and privilege whose rule is more rapacious and bloodstained than that of King George III.

Obama invoked the heroism of the revolutionaries who took up arms against the British Empire, then the most powerful on the planet, to uphold the ideals of democracy and equality. "It was bold and it was brave," he said. "And it was unprecedented, it was unthinkable. At that time in human history, it was kings and princes and emperors who made decisions."

The American Revolution was successful, he continued, and now the United States is the greatest nation in the world: "A land of liberty and opportunity. A global defender of peace and freedom. A beacon of hope to people everywhere who cherish those ideals."

In reality, the United States is a land of mass poverty and mass unemployment, in the sixth year of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. It is characterized by staggering and ever-rising levels of social inequality. It is the "global defender" of the interests of American big business, to which it systematically sacrifices the democratic rights of both the American working class and the population of the world.

Far from being a "beacon of hope," the United States is looked on around the globe as the purveyor of death and destruction, whether raining down missiles from remote-controlled drones, or vacuuming up the private communications of virtually the entire population of the world. The American military has attacked and occupied more countries than any other since the Second World War. The United States spends more on war than the next 17 countries combined. US troops have been engaged in nearly continuous warfare for the past dozen years.

Obama gave his brief address in the midst of a campaign of persecution against a genuine defender of freedom and democracy, former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, who has courageously informed the American public and the people of the world of the illegal and unconstitutional mass spying being carried out by the US government.

The president should think twice before he advises the American people "to live up to the words of that Declaration of Independence," since Jefferson's immortal prose asserts the right of the people to revolt against oppression and to replace a tyrannical government with one based on genuine equality and democracy.

Jefferson wrote those words when the American bourgeoisie was a rising and progressive class, and could genuinely speak for the entire population against the predations of the British crown. Those days are long gone. Today the American capitalist class is the most parasitic and reactionary social force on the planet, wallowing in untold wealth while the conditions of life for the vast majority of the American population stagnate and decline.

Significantly, Obama made no reference in his remarks to the other great democratic anniversary being

celebrated this week, the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, one of the critical turning points in the American Civil War. Tens of thousands of people flocked to the battlefield to take part in the commemoration, a mass turnout that has been virtually ignored, both by the corporate-controlled media and the US political establishment.

Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, could powerfully assert the direct connection between the American Revolution and the bloody struggle for freedom and against slavery 87 years later. But the American ruling class today is instinctively hostile to the historical struggles with which it was once associated.

The American people are increasingly concerned and angry over the mounting attacks on democratic rights and the vast increase in social inequality. A Gallup poll published this week found that 71 percent felt the Founding Fathers would be ashamed of modern America. That percentage has doubled over the last decade.

It is the working class, not any section of the corrupt and reactionary political establishment, that can and must take up the struggle to defend democratic rights. The decisive question is to understand the fundamental causes of the growth of militarism and police-state repression—the deepening contradictions of capitalism as a world system—and make the defense of democratic rights an integral part of the independent political mobilization of the working class in the struggle for socialism.



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