

Obama's "best of all possible worlds"

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27 September 2014

"They who assert that all is well have said a foolish thing, they should have said all is for the best... in this best of all possible worlds." —Professor Pangloss, from Voltaire's *Candide*

US President Barack Obama delivered a bellicose speech to the United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday that consisted of a series of lies and falsifications to justify a new war in the Middle East as part of a broader expansion of US militarism.

As the WSWWS noted earlier this week, what above all distinguished the speech was "the complete disconnect between its assertions and political reality. Obama's lies were so extreme and brazen, they took on a delusional character."

This applied not only to the lies Obama used to justify an illegal war, but his depiction of social and economic reality internationally and in the United States. Obama began his speech with the proclamation that "the world economy continues to strengthen after the worst financial crisis of our lives."

Obama added, "I often tell young people in the United States that despite the headlines, this is the best time in human history to be born, when you are more likely than ever before to be literate, to be healthy and to be free to pursue your dreams."

In Voltaire's novel *Candide*, the declarations of Professor Pangloss, that "all is for the best," were contradicted in experience, as the young Candide witnessed the horrors of the real world—including the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. The growing consciousness of the terrible injustices of society in pre-revolutionary Europe, reflected in the thinking of Enlightenment philosophers like Voltaire, was part of an intellectual upheaval that would erupt in the French Revolution three decades later.

It does not require an earthquake to refute Obama's Panglossian proclamations—directed specifically to youth in the United States—as they are so manifestly

opposed to the basic facts of social and economic life throughout the world. Obama stands at the head of a ruling class that has orchestrated, in the six years since the 2008 financial collapse, a redistribution of wealth unprecedented in its scope and brazenness. A handful of billionaires now control more wealth than the majority of the world's people. The transfer of trillions of dollars to the banks and the inflation of a gigantic bubble in equity markets has been accompanied by an unrelenting attack on jobs, wages and social programs.

What are the economic conditions that confront young people in the United States? This is a generation that for the first time in American history faces worse conditions than the generation that preceded it. Daily reality consists of mass unemployment, poverty wages, permanent indebtedness and economic insecurity, not to mention unending war and the assault on the most basic democratic rights.

Nearly six million young people are neither in school or working, and the unemployment rate for those between the ages 16-19 is more than 20 percent. One in five children do not get enough to eat, and the overall rate of food insecurity has grown from 11 percent in 2007 to 16 percent in 2013. As for literacy, fourteen percent of American adults, or 32 million, are illiterate, and 21 percent cannot read at a fifth-grade level—a reflection of the unending attack on the public education system under both Republicans and Democrats.

The dire prospects facing American youth were expressed in a survey of workers who lost their jobs in the past five years, reported this week on the WSWWS. The survey, which found that more than 20 percent of workers who lost their jobs are still unemployed, also documented the terrible regression of American society. More than 70 percent of workers surveyed said that the Great Recession has created "a permanent change in what are normal economic conditions in the

country.”

Only 16 percent of currently-employed survey participants agreed with the assessment that “job, career, and employment opportunities will be better for the next generation than for my generation.”

The conditions of young people are a reflection of the decline and decay of American capitalism as a whole. Contrary to Obama, everything is going backwards.

For the multibillionaire investors and CEOs, it certainly is the best time to be alive. There are no checks or restraints on what they can get away with: they lie, cheat, steal, lay off millions of people and crash the economy with impunity. The government they control carries out mass murder and torture around the world. Their police forces kill and brutalize people at will. But the victim of this “best of all possible worlds” is the working class.

The self-deluded character of Obama’s remarks express the essential nature of a ruling elite that is entirely out of touch not only with the experiences of the population, but with reality itself. The ruling class cannot acknowledge the conditions confronting millions of people and the crisis that plagues the system it sits atop, because it has absolutely nothing to propose besides the further growth of inequality and war. Yet these conditions are leading inexorably to new revolutionary struggles.



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