

# The Fourth of July

Jerry White, SEP candidate for US president  
4 July 2012

The official marking of the Fourth of July will be the usual celebration of militarism and jingoism that has long been used to undermine any understanding of the historical and contemporary significance of the Declaration of Independence, which marked the beginning of the American Revolution 236 years ago.

President Obama will dine, watch fireworks with the families of US soldiers and host a “Salute the Military” concert in Washington, DC. Amid all the flag-waving patriotism, conformism and glorification of war, it would be easy to forget that the July Fourth holiday marks one of the most liberating events in modern history.

Pioneer American Trotskyist James Cannon said long ago, “As soon as I grew old enough to look around and see what was going on in this country—all the inequality and injustice still remaining—the beneficiaries of privilege, claiming the heritage of our first revolution, struck me as impostors. I recognized the standard Fourth of July orators as phonies, as desecrators of a noble dream. They didn’t look like the Liberty Boys of ‘76.”

The effort of Obama and the rest of the bought-and-paid-for politicians in Washington to take on the mantle of 1776 is a farce and travesty. The president and his Republican challenger are not representatives of the American people, but the servants of a financial aristocracy whose wealth and power far surpasses the European ruling classes so despised by the Founding Fathers.

This Fourth of July takes place under conditions of the greatest breakdown of the world capitalist system since the 1930s and the emergence of mass social struggles that pose the need for revolution on an international scale.

The effort by the United States to seize control of the key strategic regions of the world far surpasses in its criminality the “repeated tyrannies of King George” against the Thirteen Colonies decried by Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and the other signers of the Declaration of Independence.

In words that ring as true today, the famous document condemned King George III “for quartering large bodies

of armed troops among us” “for protecting them, by a mock Trial from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States.”

Moreover the British monarch, they wrote, “has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation, and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & Perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.”

These charges would be just as valid in a war crimes trial of Obama and his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush. Millions have been killed as a result of the US military occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan, the drone attacks on Pakistan and Yemen, and the neo-colonial conquest of Libya. New wars are being planned against Syria and Iran. The aim of the plundering is the establishment of the unchallenged control by American imperialism over the oil and gas resources and pipeline routes of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The hundreds of so-called enemy combatants imprisoned and tortured in Guantanamo or CIA black site prisons around the world could rightly cite the condemnation of the British monarch, “for transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences” and “for depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury.”

Moreover, Barack Obama has reserved the “right” to indefinitely detain, spy on and even assassinate US citizens without evidence, charges or any semblance of due process. This assertion of unchecked royal power would have even made old King George blush.

The war crimes and trampling of core democratic rights have their roots in the failure of American and international capitalism and the enormous growth of social inequality. In order for the American ruling class to impose its deeply reactionary agenda of austerity and imperialist expansion, it is dispensing with democracy and resorting to ever more repressive forms of rule.

As Marxists we are well aware of the historical limitations of the American Revolution, which was a bourgeois democratic revolution. Its great ideals could not be fully realized within the socioeconomic framework of eighteenth century America, which was dominated by capitalist property relations and chattel slavery. However, socialists have always rejected the post-modernist drivel and anti-historical attacks by the middle class proponents of identity politics who deny the world historical significance of the American Revolution.

In their declaration of the “unalienable rights” of man, their insistence that government must derive its powers from the “consent of the governed” and their championing of the egalitarian conceptions of the Enlightenment, the American revolutionaries opened up a new era for mankind. In a little more than a decade, the upheaval in the New World was followed by the even more sweeping revolution in France, and 1776 would continue to have international reverberations for generations thereafter.

In its opening section, the Declaration of Independence states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Such conceptions are dismissed out of hand by the modern day Tories in both big business parties who are daily depriving the majority of the population of their lives, liberties and pursuit of happiness.

American historian Gordon Wood said of the American Revolution, “Nothing contributed more to this explosion of energy than did the idea of equality. Equality was in fact the most radical and most powerful ideological force let loose in the Revolution... Once invoked, the idea of equality could not be stopped, and it tore through American society and culture with awesome power. It became what Herman Melville called, ‘the great God absolute! The center and circumference of all democracy!’”

The overriding principle of contemporary American society is inequality. This is a country where billionaires buy Hawaiian Islands while half of the American population is categorized as poor or near poor. Whether Obama or Mitt Romney is elected in November, the winner will rule, not with the consent of the people, but at the bidding of Wall Street, which, with the rest of corporate America, is financing their \$3 billion presidential campaigns.

The Declaration of Independence insisted that the

American people—and the people of the world—had the right to overthrow any government that fell to entrenched wealth and power and violated these inalienable principles. Whenever any form of government did this, the Founders wrote, “it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

The real heirs of these revolutionary traditions are not the representatives of the American ruling class, but the workers and youth of the United States and around the world who are entering into struggle against inequality, war, and the attack on democratic rights. A new revolutionary movement must have at its center the struggle for social equality, a principle that is incompatible with the continued existence of the capitalist system.

Capitalism has failed and the ruling classes by virtue of their avarice, criminality and recklessness have forfeited any moral or political justification for their continued rule. The only social force whose historic interests are bound up with the fight for genuine equality and democracy is the international working class.

My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I are campaigning to bring this perspective to workers and young people, and to build the revolutionary leadership to actualize it.

*For more information on the SEP campaign, visit [socialequality.com](http://socialequality.com)*



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**