

“Progressive Democrats”: Resist and Submit, Retreat and Surrender

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Introduction

Over the past quarter century progressive writers, activists and academics have followed a trajectory from left to right – with each presidential campaign seeming to move them further to the right. Beginning in the 1990’s progressives mobilized millions in opposition to wars, voicing demands for the transformation of the US’s corporate for-profit medical system into a national ‘Medicare For All’ public program. They condemned the notorious Wall Street swindlers and denounced police state legislation and violence. But in the end, they always voted for Democratic Party Presidential candidates who pursued the exact opposite agenda.

Over time this political contrast between program and practice led to the transformation of the Progressives. And what we see today are US progressives embracing and promoting the politics of the far right.

To understand this transformation we will begin by identifying who and what the progressives are and describe their historical role. We will then proceed to identify their trajectory over the recent decades.

We will outline the contours of recent Presidential campaigns where Progressives were deeply involved.

We will focus on the dynamics of political regression: From resistance to submission, from retreat to surrender.

We will conclude by discussing the end result: The Progressives’ large-scale, long-term embrace of far-right ideology and practice.

Progressives by Name and Posture

Progressives purport to embrace ‘progress’, the growth of the economy, the enrichment of society and freedom from arbitrary government. Central to the Progressive agenda was the end of elite corruption and good governance, based on democratic procedures.

Progressives prided themselves as appealing to ‘reason, diplomacy and conciliation’, not brute force and wars. They upheld the sovereignty of other nations and eschewed militarism and armed intervention.

Progressives proposed a vision of their fellow citizens pursuing incremental evolution toward the ‘good society’, free from the foreign entanglements, which had entrapped the people in unjust wars.

Progressives in Historical Perspective

In the early part of the 20th century, progressives favored political equality while opposing extra-parliamentary social transformations. They supported gender equality and environmental preservation while failing to give prominence to the struggles of workers and African Americans.



They denounced militarism 'in general' but supported a series of 'wars to end all wars'. Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson embodied the dual policies of promoting peace at home and bloody imperial wars overseas. By the middle of the 20th century, different strands emerged under the progressive umbrella. Progressives split between traditional good government advocates and modernists who backed socio-economic reforms, civil liberties and rights.

Progressives supported legislation to regulate monopolies, encouraged collective bargaining and defended the Bill of Rights.

Progressives opposed wars and militarism in theory... until their government went to war.

Lacking an effective third political party, progressives came to see themselves as the 'left wing' of the Democratic Party, allies of labor and civil rights movements and defenders of civil liberties.

Progressives joined civil rights leaders in marches, but mostly relied on legal and electoral means to advance African American rights.

Progressives played a pivotal role in fighting McCarthyism, though ultimately it was the Secretary of the Army and the military high command that brought Senator McCarthy to his knees.

Progressives provided legal defense when the social movements disrupted the House UnAmerican Activities Committee.

They popularized the legislative arguments that eventually outlawed segregation, but it was courageous Afro-American leaders heading mass movements that won the struggle for integration and civil rights.

In many ways the Progressives complemented the mass struggles, but their limits were defined by the constraints of their membership in the Democratic Party.

The alliance between Progressives and social movements peaked in the late sixties to mid-1970's when the Progressives followed the lead of dynamic and advancing social movements and community organizers especially in opposition to the wars in Indochina and the military draft.

The Retreat of the Progressives

By the late 1970's the Progressives had cut their anchor to the social movements, as the anti-war, civil rights and labor movements lost their impetus (and direction).

The numbers of progressives within the left wing of the Democratic Party increased through recruitment from earlier social movements. Paradoxically, while their 'numbers' were up, their caliber had declined, as they sought to 'fit in' with the pro-business, pro-war agenda of their President's party.

Without the pressure of the 'populist street' the 'Progressives-turned-Democrats' adapted to the corporate culture in the Party. The Progressives signed off on a fatal compromise: The corporate elite secured the electoral party while the Progressives were allowed to write enlightened manifestos about the candidates and their programs . . . which were quickly dismissed once the Democrats took office. Yet the ability to influence the 'electoral rhetoric' was seen by the Progressives as a sufficient justification for remaining inside the Democratic Party.

Moreover the Progressives argued that by strengthening their presence in the Democratic Party, (their self-proclaimed 'boring from within' strategy), they would capture the party membership, neutralize the pro-corporation, militarist elements that nominated the president and peacefully transform the party into a 'vehicle for progressive changes'.

Upon their successful 'deep penetration' the Progressives, now cut off from the increasingly disorganized mass social movements, coopted and bought out many prominent black, labor and civil liberty activists and leaders, while collaborating with what they dubbed the more malleable 'centrist' Democrats. These mythical creatures were really pro-corporate Democrats who condescended to occasionally converse with the Progressives while working for the Wall Street and Pentagon elite.

The Retreat of the Progressives: The Clinton Decade

Progressives adapted the 'crab strategy': Moving side-ways and then backwards but never forward.

Progressives mounted candidates in the Presidential primaries, which were predictably defeated by the corporate Party apparatus, and then submitted immediately to the outcome.

The election of President 'Bill' Clinton launched a period of unrestrained financial plunder, major wars of aggression in Europe (Yugoslavia) and the Middle East (Iraq), a military intervention in Somalia and secured Israel's victory over any remnant of a secular Palestinian leadership as well as its destruction of Lebanon!



Former US President Bill Clinton

Like a huge collective ‘Monica Lewinsky’ robot, the Progressives in the Democratic Party bent over and swallowed Clinton’s vicious 1999 savaging of the venerable Glass Steagall Act, thereby opening the floodgates for massive speculation on Wall Street through the previously regulated banking sector. When President Clinton gutted welfare programs, forcing single mothers to take minimum-wage jobs without provision for safe childcare, millions of poor white and minority women were forced to abandon their children to dangerous makeshift arrangements in order to retain any residual public support and access to minimal health care. Progressives looked the other way.

Progressives followed Clinton’s deep throated thrust toward the far right, as he outsourced manufacturing jobs to Mexico (NAFTA) and re-appointed Federal Reserve’s free market, Ayn Rand-fanatic, Alan Greenspan.

Progressives repeatedly kneeled before President Clinton marking their submission to the Democrats’ ‘hard right’ policies.

The election of Republican President G. W. Bush (2001-2009) permitted Progressive’s to temporarily trot out and burnish their anti-war, anti-Wall Street credentials. Out in the street, they protested Bush’s savage invasion of Iraq (but not the destruction of Afghanistan). They protested the media reports of torture in Abu Ghraib under Bush, but not the massive bombing and starvation of millions of Iraqis that had occurred under Clinton. Progressives protested the expulsion of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, but were silent over the brutal uprooting of refugees resulting from US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the systematic destruction of their nations’ infrastructure.

Progressives embraced Israel’s bombing, jailing and torture of Palestinians by voting unanimously in favor of increasing the annual \$3 billion dollar military handouts to the brutal Jewish State. They supported Israel’s bombing and slaughter in Lebanon.

Progressives were in retreat, but retained a muffled voice and inconsequential vote in favor of peace, justice and civil liberties. They kept a certain distance from the worst of the police state decrees by the Republican Administration.

Progressives and Obama: From Retreat to Surrender

While Progressives maintained their tepid commitment to civil liberties, and their highly ‘leveraged’ hopes for peace in the Middle East, they jumped uncritically into the highly choreographed Democratic Party campaign for Barack Obama, ‘Wall Street’s First Black President’.

Progressives had given up their quest to ‘realign’ the Democratic Party ‘from within’: they

turned from serious tourism to permanent residency. Progressives provided the foot soldiers for the election and re-election of the warmongering 'Peace Candidate' Obama. After the election, Progressives rushed to join the lower echelons of his Administration. Black and white politicians joined hands in their heroic struggle to erase the last vestiges of the Progressives' historical legacy.

Obama increased the number of Bush-era imperial wars to attacking seven weak nations under American's 'First Black' President's bombardment, while the Progressives ensured that the streets were quiet and empty.

When Obama provided trillions of dollars of public money to rescue Wall Street and the bankers, while sacrificing two million poor and middle class mortgage holders, the Progressives only criticized the bankers who received the bailout, but not Obama's Presidential decision to protect and reward the mega-swindlers.



Under the Obama regime social inequalities within the United States grew at an unprecedented rate. The Police State Patriot Act was massively extended to give President Obama the power to order the assassination of US citizens abroad without judicial process. The Progressives did not resign when Obama's 'kill orders' extended to the 'mistaken' murder of his target's children and other family member, as well as unidentified bystanders. The icon carriers still paraded their banner of the 'first black American President' when tens of thousands of black Libyans and immigrant workers were slaughtered in his regime-change war against President Gadhafi.

Obama surpassed the record of all previous Republican office holders in terms of the massive numbers of immigrant workers arrested and expelled – 2 million. Progressives applauded the Latino protestors while supporting the policies of their 'first black President'.

Progressive accepted that multiple wars, Wall Street bailouts and the extended police state were now the price they would pay to remain part of the "Democratic coalition" (sic).

The deeper the Progressives swilled at the Democratic Party trough, the more they embraced the Obama's free market agenda and the more they ignored the increasing impoverishment, exploitation and medical industry-led opioid addiction of American workers that was shortening their lives. Under Obama, the Progressives totally abandoned the historic American working class, accepting their degradation into what Madam Hillary Clinton curtly dismissed as the 'deplorables'.

With the Obama Presidency, the Progressive retreat turned into a rout, surrendering with one flaccid caveat: the Democratic Party 'Socialist' Bernie Sanders, who had voted 90% of the time with the Corporate Party, had revived a bastardized military-welfare state agenda.

Sander's Progressive demagoguery shouted and rasped on the campaign trail, beguiling the young electorate. The 'Bernie' eventually 'sheep-dogged' his supporters into the pro-war Democratic Party corral. Sanders revived an illusion of the pre-1990 progressive agenda, promising resistance while demanding voter submission to Wall Street warlord Hillary Clinton. After Sanders' round up of the motley progressive herd, he staked them tightly to the far-right Wall Street war mongering Hillary Clinton. The Progressives not only embraced Madame Secretary Clinton's nuclear option and virulent anti-working class agenda, they embellished it by focusing on Republican billionaire Trump's demagogic, nationalist, working class rhetoric which was designed to agitate 'the deplorables'. They even turned on the working class voters, dismissing them as 'irredeemable' racists and illiterates or 'white trash' when they turned to support Trump in massive numbers in the 'fly-over' states of the central US.

Progressives, allied with the police state, the mass media and the war machine worked to defeat and impeach Trump. Progressives surrendered completely to the Democratic Party and started to advocate its far right agenda. Hysterical McCarthyism against anyone who questioned the Democrats' promotion of war with Russia, mass media lies and manipulation of street protest against Republican elected officials became the centerpieces of the Progressive agenda. The working class and farmers had disappeared from their bastardized 'identity-centered' ideology.

Guilt by association spread throughout Progressive politics. Progressives embraced J. Edgar Hoover's FBI tactics: "Have you ever met or talked to any Russian official or relative of any Russian banker, or any Russian or even read Gogol, now or in the past?" For progressives, 'Russia-gate' defined the real focus of contemporary political struggle in this huge, complex, nuclear-armed superpower.

Progressives joined the FBI/CIA's 'Russian Bear' conspiracy: "Russia intervened and decided the Presidential election" – no matter that millions of workers and rural Americans had voted against Hillary Clinton, Wall Street's candidate and no matter that no evidence of direct interference was ever presented. Progressives could not accept that 'their constituents', the masses, had rejected Madame Clinton and preferred 'the Donald'. They attacked a shifty-eyed caricature of the repeatedly elected Russian President Putin as a subterfuge for attacking the disobedient 'white trash' electorate of 'Deploralandia'.

Progressive demagogues embraced the coifed and manicured former 'Director Comey' of the FBI, and the Mr. Potato-headed Capo of the CIA and their forty thugs in making accusations without finger or footprints.

The Progressives' far right- turn earned them hours and space on the mass media as long as they breathlessly savaged and insulted President Trump and his family members. When they managed to provoke him into a blind rage . . . they added the newly invented charge of 'psychologically unfit to lead' – presenting cheap psychobabble as grounds for impeachment. Finally! American Progressives were on their way to achieving their first and only political transformation: a Presidential coup d'état on behalf of the Far Right!

Progressives loudly condemned Trump's overtures for peace with Russia, denouncing it as appeasement and betrayal!

In return, President Trump began to 'out-militarize' the Progressives by escalating US involvement in the Middle East and South China Sea. They swooned with joy when Trump

ordered a missile strike against the Syrian government as Damascus engaged in a life and death struggle against mercenary terrorists. They dubbed the petulant release of Patriot missiles 'Presidential'.

Then Progressives turned increasingly Orwellian: Ignoring Obama's actual expulsion of over 2 million immigrant workers, they condemned Trump for promising to eventually expel 5 million more!

Progressives, under Obama, supported seven brutal illegal wars and pressed for more, but complained when Trump continued the same wars and proposed adding a few new ones. At the same time, progressives out-militarized Trump by accusing him of being 'weak' on Russia, Iran, North Korea and China. They chided him for his lack support for Israel's suppression of the Palestinians. They lauded Trump's embrace of the Saudi war against Yemen as a stepping-stone for an assault against Iran, even as millions of destitute Yemenis were exposed to cholera. The Progressives had finally embraced a biological weapon of mass destruction, when US-supplied missiles destroyed the water systems of Yemen!

Conclusion

Progressives turned full circle from supporting welfare to embracing Wall Street; from preaching peaceful co-existence to demanding a dozen wars; from recognizing the humanity and rights of undocumented immigrants to their expulsion under their 'First Black' President; from thoughtful mass media critics to servile media megaphones; from defenders of civil liberties to boosters for the police state; from staunch opponents of J. Edgar Hoover and his 'dirty tricks' to camp followers for the 'intelligence community' in its deep state campaign to overturn a national election.

Progressives moved from fighting and resisting the Right to submitting and retreating; from retreating to surrendering and finally embracing the far right.

Doing all that and more within the Democratic Party, Progressives retain and deepen their ties with the mass media, the security apparatus and the military machine, while occasionally digging up some Bernie Sanders-type demagogue to arouse an army of voters away from effective resistance to mindless collaboration.

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