



“McLaren” art digital collage image - by R. M. Fisher (2019)

## Open Letter: To Elliott Abrams (U. S. Venezuela Envoy)

[Ed. Note: Peter McLaren, Ph.D., has spent most of his long career as a popular-activist-adult educator, having been influenced by many liberation educators the likes of Paulo Freire from Brazil. His dedication is to bringing justice and quality education through critical analysis of the sociopolitical-economic and foreign policies that are so problematic and violent in creating the North-South divide, particularly in the Western hemisphere. I see this letter of challenge to a recently appointed U.S. Trump government official (Abrams) as part of the precarious political landscape of current debates and concerns, especially regarding the role of State-initiated systemic *weaponizing of fear* for power, control, violence, genocides and other atrocities.]

“Dear Mr. Elliott Abrams,

You have reappeared from the dark and slimy depths of ignominy. Was your absence just a “cooling off” period between supporting mass murders?

What unholy desires remained unfulfilled in that mind of yours, so unburdened by human decency, that you have chosen this time and place to terrify the world once again with your

sinister gaze? Your righteous indignation and your diplomatic portfolio isn't fooling anyone. It never has. But you got away with the crimes, anyway, didn't you Mr. Abrams? So what's new in American politics?

We still want to know: Why did you open the floodgates of genocide? Why did you unleash the hounds of hell on those already preyed upon by your wretched ideological kin, those who have no haven, who live on what little scraps of hope remained unscathed by the history of America's anti-socialist crusade? Why did you, newly minted Venezuela Envoy, replace the human heart with a drainage ditch?

And why have you not yet faced a human rights tribunal? Human rights tribunals were designed especially for you and men like you, who cling grimly to your crusader code, your almighty reactionary script. So why haven't you been dragged in chains into an international court of law and tried for your involvement in war crimes, crimes that defy the very nature of our unfinishedness, of our "untested feasibility" (as Paulo Freire would put it) for fostering reason, compassion and love?

Do you think we have forgotten your brazen mouth and the slime that drips from between your teeth? Your cultivated illusion was shattered decades ago. In the remnants of your tattered conscience, was there no halting thought that interrupted your decision to provide logistical and financial support to the Contras, ferrying trained killers into Nicaragua to incite violence, to murder, rape and drive insane teachers, doctors and campesinos, killers who adopted the immeasurably pragmatic CIA guerrilla warfare strategies from training manuals provided by your clandestine operatives?

How can you sit still, and to this day, defend a Guatemalan dictator found guilty of genocide? A man whose death squads exterminated 662 rural villages across the savannas and rain washed hills of the Northwest Mayan highlands, executing campesinos with weapons purchased through U.S. military aid programs, crucifying peasants, raping pregnant women, gouging out the eyes of farmers and stuffing their genitals into their mouths and throwing children into the air and impaling them on their bayonets. The death squads you so vigorously defend left bodies of women with their breasts cut off lying side-by-side with their decapitated children. Labor unionists and student activists and Catholic Action catechists were forced to wear rubber hoods filled with insecticide before they were slaughtered.

The massacre of Guatemala's Mayan Ixil people, was ruled by the government of Guatemala as genocide. And yet you downplay the complicity of the U.S. or justify it in the name of fighting the socialist bugbear. What makes you any better than Guatemalan dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt who oversaw a campaign of mass murder and torture of indigenous people in Guatemala in the 1980s? What was the role of the U.S. in training the government death squads in El Salvador, who killed nuns and Catholic priests who embraced the theology of liberation?

Why would you think of giving political cover to large-scale government assassination programs? Do you ever think of Archbishop Oscar Romero who was gunned down by an assassin as he was saying

mass? Did you even flinch at the fate of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador, who were murdered along with their housekeeper and her daughter, by a government death squad? Well, you should have. You helped to make Romero a martyr and now a saint. Your foreign policy—and to be fair, not just yours—aided and abetted this genocide!

These crimes were not committed by unnamed saboteurs. You know full well who committed them, and you even denied that some of the worst of these crimes existed. The blood is still wet on your iron fist.

I think of you Mr. Abrams, in your new office in Washington, laughing and mingling with your wide-eyed aides, setting your sights on other countries that you can terrorize. The species of fear that your policies have ham-handedly ignited in the past and are designed to ignite in the present are those associated with historical tyrants and virulently redolent of the tactics of fascists, yet re-weaponized in the hyperreal orbit of transnational politics. Your grand Manichean strategy of turning the political arena into a do-or-die fight between freedom-loving capitalists and evil socialists bent on world domination is a ruse that will be undone when young people no longer fear the word 'socialism' and vote for democratic socialist candidates such as Bernie Sanders. Blaming the crimes of totalitarian regimes on socialism is like blaming the Spanish Inquisition on the Sermon on the Mount. The young people of today may be angry but they aren't stupid. Despite the unsparing efforts of the right-wing echo chamber, they can discern the difference between the Eastern Bloc police states of the Cold War and the democratic socialism of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. It will not be lost on them that Helen Keller and Albert Einstein were socialists for a reason. So were Jane Addams, John Dewey, W.E.B. DuBois, Clarence Darrow, "Big Bill" Haywood, A. Philip Randolph, Walter Reuther, Walter Lippmann, Francis Bellamy (who wrote the "Pledge of Allegiance") and Katherine Lee Bates (who wrote "America the Beautiful") and Martin Luther King. None of these socialists ever held a political imperative that is in agreement with the Cold War totalitarian dictators who associated themselves with the socialism or communism characterized by gulags, purges and ideological conformity.

Despite the efforts of your boss and his loyal minions among the alt-right who cheer on his moral turpitude, a new politics shorn of the trauma-inducing fear for which your politics is designed (it was once called a "reign of terror") will emerge from the dung heap of the besotted dreamscape you have created. It will be a politics where fear of others will be laid to waste, a politics of freely associated labor, of compassion and reconciliation, of unity in difference, of self-determination, economic security, ecological sustainability and social justice.

Three years before I began lecturing in Venezuela, working alongside Chavistas, who were designing programs for the long-suffering Venezuelan poor, you helped to orchestrate a coup against President Hugo Chavez under your doctrine of Hemispherism. You could have succeeded in 2002 were it not for the military who remained loyal to the president and the thousands of workers who descended from the hills and surrounded Miraflores Palace, demanding the return of their beloved leader who was being held hostage by your Venezuelan lackeys. And now you have another chance at destroying that nation. Now you are back, as Trump's beloved Venezuela Envoy. What perfidy will be next on your agenda?

What is creating the ideological agglutination in your brainpan, Mr. Abrams? It's more than just an ends-justify-the-means mentality, isn't it? Whatever it is, the ghosts of El Mozote are waiting to have a conversation with you over a nice cup of ectoplasm. And the ghost of Eugene Debs is next in line for a little chat. You might want to focus on that image, Mr. Abrams. That is, if you can take your mind off planning the next coup.

It will not be destiny's fault if you succeed, but our own failure as a people to put a halt to your vile affront to democracy and to what Abraham Lincoln referred to as 'the better angels of our nature.'"

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