

Democracy and the power that corrupts it

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Victims of a barbaric bombing, the USA responded with practices that have abolished the validity of the civil rights

American democracy experiences today its worst moment. In the nineteenth century, civil rights were guaranteed. By the end of that century, thanks to popular struggles, universal suffrage was finally won and democracy became an universal value. At last, philosophers, politicians and citizens agreed that democracy is the best of the political regimes, and a *minimum* concept of democracy was established: a country is democratic when civil rights are guaranteed and the right to universal suffrage is exercised in free elections.

It was a huge progress, that, from the 1980s on, would advance due to the transition to democracy of a large number of developing countries, particularly the middle-income ones, that had already completed their national and industrial revolution.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States saw itself as a model of democracy to be followed and, since there was a grain of truth in this assumption, they were able to persuade the rest of the world. But already in the 1970s, with the United States war against Vietnam and its defeat, this democratic image began to be tarnished.

Nevertheless, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the American power was restored, and with it, in the context of the 30 Neoliberal Years of Capitalism (1979-2008), the United States transformed democracy into an ideological weapon against the relatively nationalist or developmentalist governments of poor countries that were trying to achieve their national and industrial revolution.

To act like this, it continued to see itself as a model of democracy, but that democracy was declining. It became increasingly obvious how much the power of money in elections, a backward electoral system and a constitution that could not be amended were reducing the quality of the American democracy.

But the great tragedy occurred after September 11. Victim of a barbaric terrorist attack, the American political system reacted with the Patriot Act and later with a number of practices that abolished the validity of the civil rights: systematic torture, prison without the due process of law, the murder of all those who the national security system considers as enemies of the United States, and the invasion of everybody's privacy.

But torture, illegal prison and murder would only happen to terrorist foreigners. It is not true. And since when does the fact of being a foreigner justify violence against his civil rights? Now, when we become aware of the invasion of the privacy of millions of individuals, it is despotism that is being installed.

As remarked by Daniel Ellsberg in an article in *The Guardian* (June 11), “since 9/11, there has been, at first secretly but increasingly openly, a revocation of the bill of rights for which this country fought over 200 years ago”.

We know that excessive power corrupts. Today, the United States does not meet the minimum concept of democracy. Its regression at the political level is a sad fact that feeds the pessimistic prognoses of those who refuse to believe in progress and democratization. It is a consequence of that country's excessive power, that justifies despotism in the name of a “national security” that is nothing else but the very expression of this power.