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The year of voting dangerously

The second half of 2016 has been laden with disastrous headlines for social democrats. It started with white English and Welsh workers and suburban and village homeowners electing to depart the European Union. It gained force when less than a quarter of eligible voters undermined the peace process between the state and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia because evangelical Catholics and Protestants organized to block provisions of the accord that guaranteed women's rights and those of sexual minorities. And it reached its apogee with the uneducated fraction of the white electorate in the US voting for Donald Trump.

His adversary Hillary Clinton is dull, reactionary, and so laden with (unproven) allegations of corruption as to render her ability to govern highly questionable. Even her (very corporate) feminism did not speak to many, many female voters – principally white folks without college degrees (Malone, 2016; Pardo de Vera, 2016).

For his part, Trump is prejudiced, angry, asinine, and so laden with (unproven) allegations of corruption and assault as to render his ability to govern highly questionable. His brutish behavior energized the white male working class with promises of economic deliverance that he cannot keep (Kolko, 2016).

Had Clinton won but the Republicans triumphed in the other Houses, impeachment and perhaps conviction may have followed over her actions as Secretary of State and her family's fundraising practices.

Given that Trump won, there may be a major swing against his Party in the 2018 mid-term elections, as his mad notion of cutting taxes for the wealthy and upping Pentagon welfare begins to hit. The Democrats could take over both Houses, then impeach and convict him over his taxes and assaults.

Clinton opposed racism, misogyny, and homophobia, and made history as a woman candidate. Her cultural politics were spot on. And irrelevant, because she was defeated by a much more powerful cultural politics – white hatred of women, dynamized by rejection of financial globalization and the desire for an outsider to support.

Clinton was, in any event, a dreadful candidate, lacking the flair, spontaneity, and freshness of Barack Obama or Bill Clinton. She was reminiscent of John Kerry in her blandness and lack of verve. And the Democrats failed abysmally to get the vote out (Withnall, 2016).

Pablo Iglesias Turrión (2016), the radical Spanish political scientist turned politician, sees Trump as a fascist populist, perverting his own privileged, ruling-class background, and oleaginous property dealings into a bizarre status as a supposed outsider, marginalized, and silenced. Trump represents a longstanding tendency in US politics. Fifty years ago, the lapsed leftist Richard Hofstadter published an epochal 1964 essay in *Harper's Magazine* entitled 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics.' Hofstadter used the word 'paranoid' to capture the 'heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy' that characterized US ideological struggles. He was not suggesting politicians were clinically ill, but that they had the propensity to state unfounded and brutal ideas then seek to put them into practice.

Hofstadter identified a tendency in the debating content and tactic of US speechmaking that sought to expose internal and external conspiracies against the 'real' America. The enemy might be Catholic, black, Jewish, secular, Russian, Marxist, or Masonic, and it might be poised to strike in the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries. Its identity mutated – but the threat was always there, lurking, poised to destabilize republican virtues.

The persistence of ethnic and religious transformations in the population, and fear of cosmopolitanism, has fueled these fantasies across the ages, as more and more people appear on the horizon who look, sound, or genuflect differently. The paranoid politician is afflicted with a terror of the past, present, and future, derived from such encounters with change and newness and the interplay of a death dance, with reality and fantasy intertwined.

Trump spoke out against neoliberal financial globalization, which has been a spectacularly failed but bipartisan policy among Republicans and Democrats since Jimmy Carter's Presidency. He touched those who were promised great things by open markets, but whose jobs disappeared and incomes fell; those once represented by the Democratic Party, but whose sense of white supremacy has been fatally compromised by changes across much of the nation and the anti-racism that has become the new grassroots of that party. Today's Republican base lags behind rapidly emerging demographic trends in terms of age, ethnicity, language, religion, and education (Pew Research Center, 2016) – but it remains sizeable and dependably enraged, as per this paranoid style. It was ripe for exploitation.

Of course, these regrettable tendencies are not limited to the US. The far right celebrated his victory across Europe ("Will Trump-Style," 2016). It is said that the Kremlin was working with Trump's campaign (Dearden, 2016) and may have compromising evidence (Corn, 2016) about his behavior and business dealings, and Russia's massive Alfa Bank appears to have a private Internet line to the tycoon (Foer, 2016).

NATO officials and advocates are concerned, given the rumors. Unsurprisingly, Trump is running an isolationist but pro-Russia campaign in terms of foreign policy, which suggests Syria will continue to be the object of devastation at the hands of Putin and his puppet Assad (Fisk, 2016).

We can only guess what this Administration will be like; at the time of writing, leaks and rumors circulate to the effect that old-school Republican technocrats, who at least made some of the trains run on time (if in the wrong direction) may be out of luck, displaced by familial nepotism and jobs for ideologues.

For now, we can only hope that, even with a majority of both Houses and (probably) the Supreme Court, the checks and balances of the US system will defend hard-fought citizenship rights against a wave of privileged populism.

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