

The Democrats' Dangerous Diversion

Exclusive: The Democrats won't admit that they lost to Donald Trump because they ran a deeply flawed, corporate-oriented candidate, so they blame Russia instead, a very dangerous diversion, says Nicolas J S Davies.

By Nicolas J S Davies

The current debate over "fake news" has reminded me of a conversation I had several years ago with a former citizen of East Germany, now living in the United States. He explained that, in East Germany, everybody knew that what the media told them about their own country was a bunch of lies and propaganda. So they assumed that what the media told them about the West was just propaganda, too.

Now living in the U.S., he had come to realize that a lot of what the East German media said about life in the U.S. was actually true. There really are people living on the street, people with no access to healthcare, widespread poverty, a lack of social welfare and public services, and many other problems, as the East German media accurately reported, and as the Chinese government also noted in its latest report on human rights in the U.S.

My friend wished he and his countrymen had understood the difference between what their media told them about their country and what they reported about the West. Then they could have made more intelligent choices about which aspects of life in the West to adopt, instead of allowing Western experts to come in and impose the entire neoliberal model on their country.

In the West, of course, the state media of East Germany and other Communist countries were held up to ridicule. I remember hearing that people in the U.S.S.R. would open their newspapers in the morning and have a good laugh at the latest "fake news" in *Pravda*. But, as my German friend eventually understood, there was some truth amongst the propaganda, and the hidden danger of such a corrupted media system is that people end up not knowing what to believe, making informed democratic choices almost impossible.

In the end, people all over Eastern Europe were cornered into a false choice between two ideological systems that both came as top-down package deals, instead of being able to take charge of their own societies and democratically decide their own future.

In the U.S., we live under a two-party political system, not a one-party system as in East Germany, and our media reflect that. As each of our two main

political parties and our media have fallen more totally under the sway of unbridled plutocratic interests, our mass media has devolved into a bifurcated version of what my friend observed in East Germany, triply corrupted by commercial interests, partisan bias and ideological and nationalist propaganda.

Down the Rabbit Hole

Since the 2016 election campaign, our political system seems to have devolved into something like the nonsense world of Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*, with Donald Trump as the Queen of Hearts, Hillary Clinton as Humpty Dumpty, the Republicans and Democrats as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the election as the Caucus Race (which Lewis Carroll based on U.S. political caucuses) and the whipsawed American public as the permanently baffled Alice.

In Lewis Carroll's Caucus Race, an assortment of creatures ran randomly around a racetrack with no start or finish line, until the Dodo called the race over, declared them all winners and told Alice (the public?) she had to give them all prizes.

In similar fashion, the 2016 election between two of the most unpopular presidential candidates in U.S. history seems to have no finish line, but to live on in round-the-clock campaigns to corral the public into one of its two camps. The artificial, top-down nature of both these campaigns should be a warning that, like the election campaigns they grew out of, they are designed to corral, control and direct masses of people, not to offer real solutions to any of the serious problems facing our country and the world.

On one hand, we have President Trump, Republican Congressional leaders, Breitbart, Fox News and Rush Limbaugh, spouting nonsense worthy of Lewis Carroll, even in major presidential speeches, while dismissing criticism as "fake news."

The Trump camp will never acknowledge that only a quarter of voting-age Americans voted for him, nor that even less of us share his views or the interests he represents. In this corrupt two-party system, no effort or expense is spared to persuade the public that we must vote for one of the two major party presidential candidates, whether we agree with either of them or not. But that cuts both ways, leaving most of the public unrepresented no matter who wins, and depriving any new government of a genuine popular mandate.

But Republican leaders play a more straightforward winner-take-all game than the Democrats. So they will try to ride Trump's victory and their Congressional majorities as far as they will take them on all fronts: more tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations; more draconian cuts in social spending;

more privatization of healthcare, education and other public services; more detention and deportation of immigrants; a more aggressive police response to social problems and public protest; more destruction of the natural world and the climate; and more increases in a military budget that already broke post-WWII records under Bush and Obama, to fuel a more openly aggressive and dangerous war policy – in other words, more of all the things that most Americans would agree we have already had too much of.

On the other side, Democratic Party leaders and the CIA, supported by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN and MSNBC, have conjured up unproven charges that Russia stole the election for Trump as the heart of their campaign against him. In Trump, history has handed them a political opponent with a piñata of vulnerabilities, from unprecedented conflicts of interest to policies that benefit only his own wealthy class to willful ignorance of how almost everything he is responsible for as president really works.

And yet the cabal formerly known as the Clinton campaign shows little interest in pointing out that our new Emperor has no clothes on, let alone in seriously resisting his repressive, plutocratic policies, and is instead obsessed with convincing the public that a birthmark on his naked bum looks like a hammer and sickle.

A Saving Grace?

Paradoxically, if Trump really reduced tensions between the U.S. and Russia, as his hawkish Democratic opponents fear, that could be the saving grace of his entire presidency. George W. Bush's and Barack Obama's regime change wars, NATO expansion and the U.S.-backed coup in Ukraine have ignited a new Cold War that many respected scientists believe has raised the risk of human mass extinction to its highest level since the 1950s.

In the pursuit of false security based on post-Cold War triumphalism and a fleeting mirage of military supremacy, our corrupt leaders have jeopardized not just our security but our very existence, leaving us at two and a half minutes to midnight on the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS)*' Doomsday Clock.

As Jonathan Marshall at Consortiumnews.com reported on March 10, experts from the Federation of American Scientists, the Natural Resources Defense Council and MIT wrote in a recent BAS article that new "super-fuzes" installed on U.S. nuclear warheads since 2009 have significantly increased the danger of nuclear war by giving the U.S. the ability to destroy all Russia's fixed land-based nuclear missiles with only a fraction of U.S. own weapons.

Coupled with President Obama's deployment of a formerly illegal ABM (anti-ballistic missile) system on Aegis missile destroyers and at bases in Eastern Europe, the authors wrote that this upgrade to U.S. nuclear warheads is "exactly what one would expect to see if a nuclear-armed state were planning to have the capacity to fight and win a nuclear war by disarming enemies with a surprise first strike." They concluded that "Russian planners will almost surely see the advance in fuzing capability as empowering an increasingly feasible U.S. preemptive nuclear strike capability."

In the case of a suspected Russian nuclear missile launch, the U.S. satellite-based early warning system can give President Trump 30 minutes to judge whether we are really facing a nuclear attack or not. But Russia's land-based early warning system is not so generous. In the case of a suspected U.S. nuclear launch targeting Russia, President Putin would have as little as 7 to 13 minutes to decide whether Russia was really under nuclear attack and whether to retaliate.

In the midst of escalating tensions over Syria, Ukraine, Iran or some other new crisis, a realistic fear of a U.S. first strike could force a hasty decision by Russian officials and seal the fate of humanity. The *BAS* authors believe that this predicament leaves Russia little choice but to pre-delegate its nuclear launch authority to lower levels of command, increasing the risk of an accidental or mistaken launch of nuclear weapons.

In an epitome of understatement, they point out that, "Forcing this situation upon the Russian government seems likely to be detrimental to the security interests of the United States and its Western allies."

While U.S. officials are largely silent about the dangers of these developments in U.S. nuclear weapons policy, President Putin has spoken frankly about them and expressed dismay that the U.S. has rejected every Russian offer of cooperation to reduce these risks. Talking to a group of journalists at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2016, he concluded, "I don't know how this is all going to end. ... What I do know is that we will need to defend ourselves."

But despite the existential dangers of deteriorating relations with Russia, Democratic Party leaders have grasped the CIA's unproven "assessments" that Russia may have tried to influence the outcome of the U.S. election as a lifeline by which to salvage their positions of power after their party's electoral implosion.

Since the leadership of the Democratic Party was taken over by the corporate-backed Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) a generation ago, it has followed an

unwritten rule that it must never accept responsibility for losing an election, nor respond to signs of public disaffection with any weakening of its commitment to pro-corporate, neoliberal policies. In its desperation to prevent the democratic reform of the Democratic Party, it is aggressively tarring nuclear-armed Russia with the same brush it used to tar and feather Ralph Nader after the 2000 election.

The mortal aversion of Democratic Party leaders to progressive reform suggests that they prize their own control of the party even above winning elections, the rational purpose of any political party. Their ugly smear campaign against Keith Ellison, the progressive candidate for Democratic National Committee (DNC) chair, mirrored the DNC's corrupt campaign to undermine Sen. Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries and the DLC cabal's bare-knuckles response to progressive challengers for the past 30 years.

For the DLC Democrats to snatch defeat from the jaws of the long-term victory that the country's shifting demographics seem to guarantee their party requires a truly historic level of corruption.

Their unshakable commitment to fight tooth and nail for the interests of their wealthy campaign contributors over those of poorer, younger and darker-skinned voters in every election, every national, state and local party committee and on every issue, even as they pretend they are doing the exact opposite, could only be a viable political strategy in Lewis Carroll's Wonderland. In the real world, their demonstrated disdain for the people from whose votes they derive their power is a strategy for political suicide.

Different Kind of Politics

These corrupt party leaders and their corporate media cheerleaders dare not remind us that Bernie Sanders's candidacy for president inspired more enthusiasm and drew bigger crowds than Trump's or Clinton's, despite one eightieth of the early media promotion lavished on Trump by some corporate media and the fact that almost the entire Democratic Party establishment lined up against him.

For decades, DLC Democrats have run on vague messages about "values" to avoid being cornered into explicit progressive policy positions that might alienate their wealthy patrons. Sanders was greeted with open arms by younger voters ready for a renaissance of real politics based on actual policies that solve real problems, like universal healthcare, free college tuition, progressive taxation to pay for it all and a more cautious approach to U.S.-backed "regime change" in other countries.

By contrast, an analysis of campaign messaging by the Wesleyan Media Project

found that “Clinton’s message was devoid of policy discussions” when compared to other recent presidential campaigns, including even Trump’s, and that this was a critical factor in her failure.

According to opinion polls, Bernie Sanders may now be the most popular politician in America. Polls consistently showed that Sanders was likely to beat Trump in the general election if the Democratic Party allowed him to get that far, but the DNC fundraising machine pulled out every trick in the book to make sure that didn’t happen. If truth be told, Sanders’s success was probably a more accurate reflection of the evolving political views of a majority of Americans in 2016 than the billion-dollar auction of the presidency between the Game Show King and the Queen of Chaos.

These two camps represent factions of the powerful interests that have controlled American politics for decades, from the military-industrial complex and the CIA to the dirty energy and for-profit “healthcare” industries, to say nothing of the commercial media industry itself, which covered this election all the way to the bank and for whom the show must go on and on and on ... and on.

Lies of Both Sides.

Like the people of East Germany in the 1980s, we now face the challenge of a society in crisis, compounded by a treacherous media environment, with not just one, but two competing camps presenting us with false, self-serving interpretations of the multi-faceted crisis their corruption has spawned. While they compete for our trust, they share a common interest in insisting that one of the two mythological worldviews they have staked out must be right.

But as Cornel West recently told the students at my local high school in Miami in a Black History Month speech, “You don’t have to choose between the lies on one side and the lies on the other side.” So the question becomes where to turn for something other than lies, and how to recognize the truth when we stumble across it.

The paradox of our Internet age is that we nearly all have access to a wider range of media than ever before, yet we are still exposed and susceptible to corporate, partisan and ideological propaganda. In theory, we no longer have to be victims of for-profit media whose business models prioritize their profits over their duty to inform the public. But in reality, we do not form our views of the world as independently as we think we do.

This is easier to grasp in the case of commercial advertising than in the arena of political or ideological indoctrination. There is a well-known dictum in the business world that goes, “I know that half the money we spend on advertising is

wasted. I just don't know which half." The flip-side of this is that the other half is not wasted.

So the advertising industry in the United States spends \$220 billion per year, \$700 for each man, woman and child in the country, to sell us products and services. And yet we still like to think that we make independent, rational choices about our spending, based on enlightened self-interest and cultivated tastes, not on the work of copywriters churning out pitches, images and jingles in ad agency cubicles.

One of the by-products of the mass monetization of American politics since the 1980s is that politics has become a profitable new arena for advertising, marketing and public relations firms. Its practitioners apply the techniques and experience they've developed in other areas to the world of politics, helping politicians and parties to convert the money they raise from wealthy campaign contributors into votes, and ultimately into power over all our lives. So we should be just as wary of political marketing and advertising as of the commercial variety. We should also be more humble in recognizing our own vulnerability to these profitable forms of persuasion and deception.

My copy of *Alice in Wonderland* has a quotation from James Joyce in the front of the book: "Wipe your glasses with what you know." What we know is often our best protection against being misled by advertisers, politicians and pundits, if we will only remember what we know and trust it over the misinformation that surrounds us.

"Wiping our glasses with what we know" can provide a reality check on the current Russophobia campaign. We know very well that the U.S. and Russia possess the bulk of the world's nuclear weapons, and that war between our two countries would likely mean death for ourselves and our families and the end of life as we know it for people everywhere.

We also know that it is our country and its allies, not Russia, that have launched invasions, military occupations, bombing campaigns, coups and drone wars against at least ten countries in the past 20 years, while Russia only recently become engaged in two of these conflict zones when its interests were directly impacted by our actions.

So we can see that the greatest danger in this relationship is not the threat of some unprovoked and unprecedented act of Russian aggression. The more real and serious danger is that a confrontation with Russia over one of the hot spots we have ignited will lead to an escalation of tensions in which a mistake, a misunderstanding, a miscalculation, a bluff called, a "red line" crossed or some other kind of failed brinksmanship will trigger a war that will escalate to the

use of nuclear weapons, and from there to Armageddon.

Even with the lines of communication set up after the Cuban missile crisis and the stabilization of the Cold War balance of terror by the principle of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), we now know that we came very close to Armageddon many times, including simply by accident.

Instead of being corralled by either side in the “Russia did it” campaign, we should be urging our leaders to sit down and talk seriously with Russia’s leaders, to stop taking dangerous actions that exacerbate tensions, uncertainties and mutual isolation, and to return to serious negotiations to leave our children and grandchildren a peaceful world, free of nuclear weapons, where these dangers will no longer threaten them.

Amid lies and distortions on all sides, the corruption of politics and media by commercial interests and the billion dollars per year our government spends directly on public relations and propaganda, James Joyce’s advice can still serve us well. Make sure to wipe your glasses with what you know as you read or watch “news” from any source or listen to politicians of any party, and we may just find a way out of this rabbit hole before the roof crashes in on us.

Nicolas J S Davies is the author of *Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. He also wrote the chapters on “Obama at War” in *Grading the 44th President: a Report Card on Barack Obama’s First Term as a Progressive Leader*.
