

Growing Poverty Fuels Europe's Extremism

The European Union's neoliberal economic orthodoxy has spread income inequality and even poverty across the Continent, spurring extremist movements to challenge this system, reports Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

The rise of protest movements across Europe, with increasing support for extremist candidates and political parties, comes against the backdrop of a growing sense of insecurity for the middle and lower classes across the continent.

Less stable employment conditions and the stagnation or regression of salaries have created the fertile ground for populist movements on the right in particular, which now mix their traditional nationalist and anti-immigrant rhetoric, with criticism of the economic orthodoxy of the supranational European Union (E.U.) institutions.

In recent years the prevailing response from economists has been that many Western nations are simply unable to compete in sectors dominated by low costs and the high efficiency unleashed by globalization. This narrative, however, is used to hide a more troubling reality: government institutions have contributed directly to the economic difficulties with their own actions, driving down living standards through multiple waves of austerity and blocking attempts to break from the neoliberal principles that dominate among E.U. institutions.

The latest Economic Bulletin from the European Central Bank (ECB) presents a range of statistics that highlight the worsening of living conditions even among the wealthiest countries on the continent. First of all, the ECB admits that the official unemployment rate, high but improving, fails to account for categories such as workers who are part-time for economic reasons or who are no longer actively searching for a job. As we have known in the U.S. for years, broader measures of unemployment can make the actual rate practically double, taking into account problems that the headline statistic easily masks.

According to Prometeia, a respected Italian economic research institute, this alternative view of the weakness of the labor market may explain "why poverty levels are not following a descending path, since official labor market statistics may have hidden underemployment."

The growth in the poverty rate across Europe confirms this impression, and shows that the vaunted social welfare state that European countries are known for has

failed to protect citizens from the effects of the economic crisis.

In aggregate terms, for the entire Eurozone (the 19 countries using the common currency), poverty increased from 16.1 percent of the population in 2007, to 17.2 percent in 2015. This includes rises in wealthy countries, such as Italy, France, the Netherlands and Germany. The biggest surprise is found in the figures for Germany: poverty jumped by 1.5 percent over the cited time period, three times the increase in Italy and France.

Although it may not seem like a large rise, this statistic is notable because it goes against the common narrative of the strength of Germany as the leading economy in Europe. Germany has a large budget surplus (currently around 8 percent) and is a major player in industrial exports, in particular to new markets in Asia.

Based on this strength, German politicians often take a hard line on budget restrictions at the E.U. level, demanding that countries with greater difficulties cut spending and avoid violating the monetary parameters established for the Eurozone, which prohibit running deficits in order to boost public investment. "If only they were virtuous like us," the attitude is, "then they also would see economic growth and more social cohesion."

Expanding the 'Working Poor'

The statistics on poverty undercut this argument. Germany's economy has certainly continued to expand, but one of the side-effects has been the impoverishment of large segments of the population. If we go further into the numbers, we find that Germany has seen a big jump in working poor over the past 10 years. From a level below 5 percent in 2007, the figure reached 10 percent in 2014, before leveling off.

Clearly, one of the competitive advantages of the German economy has been blocking wage growth, and even reducing salaries and social protections for much of the population. Whereas in some other countries the gains from increased productivity have been shared with workers, in Germany the benefits have gone mostly to the top.

The main factor in creating this situation was the series of labor market reforms conceived in the early 2000s under the Hartz Commission. Peter Hartz, the Personnel Director of Volkswagen, was called on by then-Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to come up with a plan to address the high unemployment rate. The resulting proposals concentrated on increasing flexibility in the labor market, in particular changing the structure of subsidies for unemployment and welfare services.

The most severe measures came under “Hartz IV,” implemented in 2005, which forces those who are out of work to accept any offers they receive from the Federal Employment Office, on penalty of losing the meager benefits they already receive. This work requirement means that qualified professionals can find themselves earning 1 or 2 Euros an hour in “mini-jobs,” reduced to menial labor in arguably the most advanced country in Europe.

The social and political effects of the Hartz reforms are evident. Approximately 6 million people are in the subsidy system, and entire areas have come to be known as “Hartz IV neighborhoods,” dominated by people who feel trapped by a system that has provided flexibility for employers, but caused accelerating economic inequality.

Not surprisingly, it is in these areas that populist movements such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), or parties at the left or right extreme of the political spectrum, get their highest vote totals.

‘Success’ at a Cost

From a certain standpoint, Germany’s success in improving its economic indicators through the impoverishment of part of its population actually appears preferable to other alternatives under current E.U. economic policy.

Given the strict budget rules prohibiting large-scale public investment, it has become mandatory to enact “structural reforms” aimed at achieving labor market flexibility, and allowing the entry of private capital into markets previously restricted by public regulations. Germany acted in advance, and also gave a massive public bailout to its banks; now it is held up as an example for others.

A worse scenario has played out in other European countries since 2010: not only structural reforms based on neoliberal ideology, but massive levels of austerity that “cut out the middle man,” so to speak, directly reducing living standards through tax hikes and deep cuts in social services.

When the real estate bubble burst in Spain starting in 2008-2009, for example, the country was forced to implement harsh budget cuts, raise the retirement age, and cut social services. Unemployment rose to almost 25 percent, with youth unemployment close to 50 percent, while the banks were bailed out under an agreement with the E.U., the IMF and the ECB (known as the “Troika”). After years of austerity the economy is now growing again; in this case as well, the cost has been the impoverishment of large swaths of the population.

In Greece, the situation is even more dramatic. Under fire for presenting misleading or false budget numbers – with the help of international banks such as Goldman Sachs – and criticized for widespread tax evasion and an overly

generous social state, the Greek people have been subjected to continuous austerity. As a result approximately 15 percent of the population now lives in extreme poverty; a classic case of the cure being worse than the disease.

The E.U. and the IMF have cheered Greece's commitment to fiscal responsibility, while being forced to admit that this "progress" has "taken a heavy toll on the society and tested its endurance." (IMF report, Feb. 7, 2017).

One might think that these three examples of increased poverty in countries with very different images both inside and outside of Europe would lead to a profound reappraisal of the austerity policies implemented in recent years. For now, however, the leading players in the E.U. institutions have shown no intention to make a fundamental change; the "reforms" must go on.

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How China Lobby Shaped America

Exclusive: A prototype of the modern foreign lobby in Washington was the China Lobby, bribing and bending U.S. politicians to serve the will of the Nationalists who fled to Taiwan and helped fuel McCarthyism, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall (This is the second in a series on foreign lobbies.)

One of the first big foreign lobbies to blossom after passage of the 1938 Foreign Agents Registration Act was the infamous China Lobby, defined by William Safire in his political dictionary as an "attack phrase used against those urging support of Chiang Kai-shek against Mao Zedong, and later pressing for aid to Chiang on Taiwan."

Testifying to the China Lobby's seminal importance – actually what would more accurately be called the Taiwan Lobby – Safire credited it with inspiring the term "Israel lobby" to describe the equally formidable support network for another equally tiny country.

The China Lobby demanded – and won – billions of dollars in military and economic aid for Chiang's dictatorship, first on mainland China and then on

Taiwan. Exploiting the wave of anti-Communism during the McCarthy era, it also ruthlessly suppressed any criticism of Nationalist China's shortcomings or any moves toward diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China.

Some of its American operatives were opportunistic lawyer-lobbyists like Thomas Corcoran, a former New Dealer who turned his talents to money-making intrigues. Some were anti-communist militants like Gen. Claire Chennault of Flying Tigers fame, who founded a CIA-controlled airline (Civil Air Transport) with Corcoran's help to support Chiang's armies and run covert operations in the Far East.

Many were partisan Republicans who rejected criticism of Chiang's corrupt regime and attacked the Truman administration for not sending enough financial and military aid to prevent the "fall of China."

In 1949, two members of Congress called for an investigation of the lobby's "brazen power." Rep. Mike Mansfield, a Montana Democrat who would later become Senate majority leader, accused Nationalist Chinese officials – who had fled the mainland for Taiwan that year in the wake of the communist revolution – of diverting U.S. aid to fund political propaganda in the United States.

Ironically, a timely dispensation of \$800,000 from Nationalist Chinese officials in Taiwan to their New York office financed a successful campaign to squelch that proposed investigation.

A few intrepid reporters worked hard to fill the information gap. In April 1952, *Reporter* magazine ran two successive issues devoted to exposing the China Lobby.

"While what is left of Chiang's army is rusting in Formosa [another name for Taiwan], the Lobby's operators are employing all their mental and financial resources in the United States," observed editor Max Ascoli. "In the last couple of years, they have had remarkable success. Once more the big lie has proved to be unanswerable and undebatable."

Commenting on the China Lobby's ruthless methods, including McCarthyite demagoguery and the purge of liberal China experts from government, the magazine called it "the nearest thing to an effective Communist Party our country has ever had. There is no other outfit to which the China Lobby can be compared, with its hard core of fanatical, full-time operators, its underground, its legion of naïve, misled fellow travelers, its front organizations, and its foreign officials, in Washington with diplomatic immunity, who dutifully report to central headquarters."

CIA Support

The *Reporter* series likely had the support of officials in the Truman

administration, and was substantially reported by a veteran U.S. intelligence officer who went to work for *Time* magazine after serving as the CIA's first station chief in Paris.

His co-author gave an advance briefing to the assistant to the director of the CIA in March 1952, offering up one explosive detail kept out of the published version: "the Nationalist government pumped more than \$2,000,000 into the Republican campaign in 1948."

The success of Republicans in the 1952 elections, however, forced the CIA more into line with the China Lobby. Pro-Taiwan organizations like the Committee to Defend America by Aiding Anti-Communist China and the Committee on National Affairs included among their officers or directors notable front-men for CIA propaganda operations, such as William Donovan, former head of the Office of Strategic Services, Jay Lovestone, a CIA-funded labor organizer, and Cord Meyer, who took charge of the Agency's International Organizations Division in 1954.

The CIA also covertly funded anti-communist organizations such as the Free Asia Committee and Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals (ARCI), which reinforced the China Lobby's messages.

The executive chairman of ARCI, Christopher Emmet, lauded its role in "making Americans more aware of the Chinese anti-Communist cause. . . . The reason is that the humanitarian appeal for relief incidentally permits giving all the political facts about persecution, etc. . . . It does not invite argument and attack as in the case of direct political propaganda."

The first academic study of this pressure campaign finally appeared – ever so briefly – in 1960. In the introduction to his *The China Lobby in American Politics*, political scientist Ross Koen made the blockbuster allegation that "There is . . . considerable evidence that a number of [Nationalist] Chinese officials engaged in the illegal smuggling of narcotics into the United States with the full knowledge and connivance of the Nationalist Chinese Government. The evidence indicates that several prominent Americans have participated in and profited from these transactions. It indicates further that the narcotics business has been an important factor in the activities and permutations of the China Lobby."

An energetic publicist for the China Lobby got hold of advance proofs of the book and shared them with allies in the Eisenhower administration. Together they brought heavy legal and political pressure to bear on the publisher, Macmillan, to withdraw the book. The book was not reissued until 1974, by Harper & Row.

Richard Nixon and the China Lobby

Through its hard-hitting propaganda campaigns, the China Lobby prevented U.S. diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China – the most populous country on Earth – for more than two decades. Its stranglehold on U.S. foreign policy was not broken until 1972, when President Nixon finally opened talks with Beijing to help end the Vietnam War.

Ironically, Nixon had long been one of the China Lobby's most ardent supporters. He won election to the Senate from California in 1950 in part by exploiting popular dissatisfaction with the Truman administration's "loss" of China and the subsequent bloody war in Korea.

Washington columnist Drew Pearson later published the fact that Nixon took a large cash payoff from one of Chiang's nephews to help fund his successful 1950 campaign against the liberal Democratic incumbent, Helen Gahagan Douglas. Pearson also learned – but did not publish – the fact that a Nationalist Chinese agent supplied \$500,000 in cash to fund the campaign expenses of other Republican senators nationwide.

Years later, during the 1968 presidential election campaign, Nixon used the services of China Lobby notable Anna Chennault – widow of the late American general Claire Chennault and a prodigious Republican fundraiser in her own right – as his private emissary to the president of South Vietnam.

Through her, Nixon secretly blocked President Johnson's proposal for peace talks between North and South Vietnam, in order to slow momentum for Hubert Humphrey's campaign. Johnson, learning of the Nixon/Chennault intervention through top-secret intelligence sources, said nothing publicly but complained bitterly to Senate Republican Leader Everett Dirksen, "This is treason."

The China Lobby's legacy

That same year, the China Lobby inspired a parallel lobby supporting the military dictatorship of South Korea, a close anti-communist ally of Taiwan. In 1968, Richard Hanna, a Taiwan supporter and Democratic congressman from Orange County – Nixon's home ground – "instructed" South Korea's prime minister "on how to lobby the U.S. Congress effectively by emulating the successful models set by Israel and Taiwan."

Following his advice, a South Korean businessman, working with the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, began recycling commissions from U.S. rice sales to Korea to pay for lavish entertainment and outright bribes to "congressmen, cabinet members, and other influential persons" in Washington, including Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, during the Nixon years.

In late 1970, a CIA "bug" in the office of South Korea's president implicated

him in a scheme to spend upward of a million dollars a year to pay off dozens of U.S. officials, but the Nixon administration took no action.

In 1973, one member of Congress who later escaped prosecution for bribery because of the statute of limitations, wrote South Korea's president a letter of appreciation, commenting, "you have an extremely competent team working on your behalf and making things come out right for your country. Nothing, as you know, happens without a great deal of work and support."

The South Korean businessman who disbursed the bribes eventually testified before Congress in 1978, a decade after the "Koreagate" conspiracy began, under a grant of full immunity. Although he implicated some 30 members of Congress, only about 10 resigned or faced criminal charges.

Taiwan, meanwhile, continued to maintain a formidable lobby in Washington during the 1970s, despite President Nixon's betrayal in recognizing mainland China. The lobby continued to win the hearts and minds of conservative Republicans, including Ronald Reagan. Among other vehicles, it used the services of the public relations firm Deaver and Hannaford, which also represented the military dictatorships of Argentina and Guatemala.

Partner Michael Deaver, a former aide to Governor Reagan, became President Reagan's Deputy Chief of Staff in 1981. Much to Beijing's displeasure, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan proceeded to soar, from \$312 million in 1981 to a high of \$709 million in 1985. An appreciative Taiwan, along with South Korea, provided covert support for the anti-Communist "Contras" fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua during these years.

In 1987, Deaver was convicted of perjuring himself before Congress and a federal grand jury regarding his use of the White House for lobbying activities.

The China Lobby lives on, with diminished clout, in today's Republican Party. Its 2016 platform called for increased arms sales to Taiwan, reinstating it in international organizations, and a committing to its defense in case of a military showdown with China.

During the presidential campaign, candidate Donald Trump named several strong supporters of the island to his transition team. In December 2016, President-elect Trump held his notorious call with Taiwan's leader to celebrate their respective elections and laud the "close economic, political, and security ties" between the United States and Taiwan.

Since then, of course, President Trump has reversed himself on this as on so many other policies, burning bridges with Taiwan to cultivate President Xi Jinping of China. But don't count Taiwan out. If Xi fails to deliver on North

Korea, or if U.S.-China military confrontations rise anew in the South China Sea, the small island that once commanded an army of U.S. supporters may roar yet again in Washington.

Next: The Israel Lobby

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The Glorious Return of Condi Rice

Exclusive: The failure to impose meaningful accountability on the Iraq War's architects allows them to return as "wise" advisers to be consulted by media outlets and today's politicians, as with Condoleezza Rice, notes James W Carden.

By James W Carden

Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Adviser at the time of the Iraq invasion and then President George W. Bush's Secretary of State, has returned to the public eye, out promoting her new book, entitled *Democracy: Stories from the Long Road to Freedom*.

In late March, Rice met at the White House with President Donald J. Trump, who she previously had said "should not be president." Rice's return to the public eye would seem to prove the truth of Professor Stephen Walt's axiom that being a neocon means never having to say your sorry.

It seems like a lifetime ago, but there was a time when Rice's star was ascendant. An August 1999 profile of Rice in National Review dubbed Rice as "George Bush's foreign policy czarina" and described her in rapturous terms. Rice, according to the *NR*'s Jay Nordlinger, was the "very picture of American overachievement"; "If she becomes secretary of state or even something lesser, she will be big. Rock-star big"; "She is, all agree, an immensely appealing person: poised, gracious, humbly smart"; "Her television appearances have prompted marriage proposals"; "And she is very much a jock."

Nordlinger was also of the opinion that Rice was on the cusp of becoming "A major cultural figure, adorning the bedroom walls of innumerable kids and the covers of innumerable magazines."

But it was not to be. By the end of the Bush years, Rice's reputation lay

largely in tatters. “There was a time when,” *New York Times* correspondent Helene Cooper wrote in September 2007, “perhaps more than Hillary Rodham Clinton or Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice seemed to have the best shot at becoming the first woman or the first African-American to be president.”

Accounts of the early Bush years, particularly following 9/11, showed that Rice was an incompetent manager of the National Security Council process, unable or unwilling to withstand the onslaught of wondrously reckless and short-sighted advice provided by Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz.

Seeking Redemption

Rice’s new book would seem to be (yet another) shot at redemption. (Rice had previously toured the country in support of her memoir, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*.)

Writing in the *New York Times*, Walter Russell Meade, the editor of the neoconservative *American Interest*, called Rice’s *Democracy* an “important new book.”

“Her faith in the benefits and strategic importance of democracy promotion,” writes Meade “is as strong as, or stronger than, it was when she joined the George W. Bush administration in 2001.” Meade, a sympathetic reviewer who shares many of Rice’s assumptions about the beneficent power of the U.S. military, approvingly observes that her new book is an “attempt to hammer home the idea of democracy promotion as a key goal for American foreign policy.”

A child of segregated Alabama, Rice says that her foreign policy views are shaped by the ideals that animated the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. For Rice, U.S. foreign policy should be a continuation that movement, i.e., the U.S. should use its power to advance a *global* struggle for human and civil rights. It’s an idea that has intuitive appeal, yet when put into practice, the results have been little short of disastrous.

A Devastating Death Toll

The period of the last 18 years – from NATO’s ill-conceived intervention on behalf of Kosovar Muslims in Serbia in 1999 through to the present day – has been marked by an optimistic and at times unshakable faith on the part of the American political establishment in its duty and right to intervene in foreign civil conflicts under democratic or humanitarian pretexts.

The intellectual framework for this “golden age of intervention” was set forth not by an American, but by a young, dynamic British Prime Minister, Tony Blair,

during the course of NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999. In April of that year, Blair traveled to Chicago and attempted to justify the war on humanitarian grounds. In some ways, Blair's speech heralded the era of humanitarian intervention and global democracy promotion in which we still find ourselves.

Blair declared that "We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not. ...We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure." The Prime Minister continued, stating his belief that "if we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too."

Initially, Rice was slow to sign on to such a transformational project; after all, according to the author James Mann, Rice "had risen to prominence as heir to the foreign policy traditions of Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft. At Stanford and during the first Bush administration, she had been an avowed proponent of the doctrine of realism."

In an essay entitled "Promoting the National Interest" in *Foreign Affairs* in January 2000, Rice wrote presciently that "an overly broad definition of America's national interest is bound to backfire." As late as 2002, her Stanford colleague and fellow Russia specialist Michael McFaul (who served as Ambassador to Russia under President Obama) said of Rice, "She believes in realpolitik, that the main driving force of international relations is balance of power politics and that what happens internally [sic] inside a country should not be part of foreign policy."

Creeping Neoconservatism

Yet even before 9/11 and the emergence of George W. Bush's "Freedom Agenda," Rice had slowly been inching away from the realism of her mentor Scowcroft towards a conception of international affairs not markedly different from that of Tony Blair or the neoconservatives like William Kristol who once distrusted her.

It was during the period between 9/11 and commencement of the Iraq war that Rice's transformation from realist to a kind of "soft" neoconservative became complete. Thereafter, she became, like Bush, Blair, Hillary Clinton and Samantha Power, an emblematic figure of the age of intervention.

By mid-2003, Rice had become a true believer. In a speech in London that June, Rice asked "Why would anyone who shares the values of freedom seek to put a check on those values? Democratic institutions themselves are a check on the excesses of power." "Power in the service of freedom," said Rice, "is to be

welcomed.”

A valedictory piece in Foreign Affairs in July 2008, showed what a long way she traveled in eight years, from warning, on the eve of Bush’s presidency, that an “overly broad definition of America’s national interest is bound to backfire” to now expressing her belief that “cooperation with our democratic allies ... should not be judged simply by how we relate to one another. It should be judged by the work we do together to defeat terrorism and extremism, meet global challenges, defend human rights and dignity, and support new democracies.”

For Rice, “Democratic state-building is now an urgent component of our national interest.” Indeed, it is “America’s job to change the world, and in its own image.”

Today, when Rice talks about Iraq, or foreign policy in general, as she did recently with NPR’s Rachel Martin, she is given a respectful hearing. Apparently it would be a breach of decorum or the rules of the game to ask Rice whether she was concerned, embarrassed (or aware) that the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq was ultimately responsible for the rise of ISIS.

Unchallenged, Rice is allowed to paint the war and its aftermath in the most anodyne of terms. Today, according to Rice, Iraq “has a legislature that tries to function. It has a prime minister who is accountable. ... They have a very free and functioning press.” In her telling, Iraq is in many ways *better* now because “it’s not an authoritarian state any longer, and it’s not a totalitarian state in the way that it was under Saddam Hussein.”

And in perhaps the most astoundingly obtuse statement since Gary Johnson’s “what’s an Aleppo?” Rice told the apparently somnolent Martin that “It’s very different to be Iraqi today than to be Syrian.” Tell that to the residents of Mosul, the Iraqi city that was overrun by Islamic State extremists in 2014 and is now the scene of a bloody assault by Iraqi forces backed by U.S. and allied airstrikes.

The point here is that Rice shouldn’t be let off the hook so easily; after all, the costs of Bush’s Middle East adventures have been staggering. Ten years after the 2003 invasion, Brown University’s Cost of War project estimated that the war had killed roughly 190,000 people and cost \$2.2 trillion. By 2016, the costs of the combined military actions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan had grown. According to the latest figures from the project:

“ –Over 370,000 people have died due to direct war violence, and at least 800,000 more indirectly

–200,000 civilians have been killed as a result of the fighting at the hands of

all parties to the conflict

–10.1 million – the number of war refugees and displaced persons

–The US federal price tag for the Iraq war is about 4.8 trillion dollars”

Excusing Wars of Supremacy

Through the years – from her time as a NSC staffer for Bush the Elder, through her disastrous tenure as NSC adviser (followed by a marginally less-bad tenure as Secretary of State) during the administration of Bush the Lesser – Rice has developed what I have called a “soft-neoconservatism” which attempts to disguise and excuse the American will to global supremacy by camouflaging it in the “soft” language of human rights.

Her approach to global affairs marries a credulous belief in the power of “democracy promotion” with a belief in the efficacy of U.S. military power. Rice’s embrace of “democracy promotion” is no doubt wholehearted and genuine. But it is all the more troubling and dangerous because of it.

One wonders: is there really any difference between the vacuous, happy pieties of “soft-neoconservatism” of which Rice, Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright are such ardent adepts, or the “hard” neoconservatism of Beltway Caesars like Sen. Tom Cotton, Robert Kagan and Elliot Abrams, or the outright militarism of the current crop of Trump appointees like Defense Secretary James Mattis and NSC adviser H.R. McMaster?

An equally urgent question as concerns Rice in particular and the Bush crowd generally: why have they suffered no serious consequences for the disastrous decisions that were made on their watch?

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Playing Games with America’s Health Care

President Trump reneged on promises about health insurance for all to win a House vote on a bill to repeal Obamacare and cut taxes on the rich, but now Republicans have to live with the consequences, writes Michael Winship.

By Michael Winship

This just in: Health care is not a game. It's a matter life or death for millions and millions of Americans. But you sure wouldn't know it from watching Donald Trump and House Republicans celebrate their narrow victory on Thursday.

The House managed to pass a bill, the American Health Care Act (AHCA), aimed at altering or eradicating provisions of Obamacare, a somewhat muted version of the "repeal and replace" battle cry screamed throughout the election campaign but one that nevertheless will still devastate all but the richest of society with exorbitant medical costs that many cannot afford. Medicaid would be slashed by hundreds of millions. Twenty-four million fewer would be left without health insurance.

But the Republicans celebrated this impending tragedy with cheers on Capitol Hill and then got on buses to the White House for some further revelry in the Rose Garden.

"Trump basked in adulation as lawmakers heaped praise on him," Ashley Parker reported in *The Washington Post*: "... Including Trump and [vice president Mike] Pence, a dozen lawmakers and officials spoke, a snaking queue – nearly all white men – who took turns stepping to the lectern to claim their reward: cable news coverage, orchestrated by a president who values it above almost all else."

Trump shouted, "How am I doing? I'm president. Hey, I'm president. Can you believe it?" Not if I don't want to. It all felt like a chintzy version of the victory party after a high school football championship, except no one dared douse Coach Trump or assistant coaches Pence and Paul Ryan with Gatorade. Which was unfortunate.

Democrats got into the act, too, singing, "Hey hey hey, goodbye!" at the Republicans in the House chamber, reminding the GOP that they had just cast a vote that may cost many of them their seats in the 2018 midterms. The whole thing was very classy, as if the Founders high-fived, fist-bumped and burst into "We Are the Champions" after signing the Declaration of Independence.

The fact is, few Republicans have even read the bill. They did not wait for a cost estimate from the Congressional Budget Office before ramming it through. No hearings were held; no group was given the opportunity to raise its objections in such a public forum: no American Cancer Society, AARP, the March of Dimes, the American Hospital Association – all of which, along with many other professional and advocacy organizations, have made their opposition known. No American Medical Association, which announced, "millions of Americans will lose their health insurance as a direct result of this proposal..."

“Not only would the AHCA eliminate health insurance coverage for millions of Americans, the legislation would, in many cases, eliminate the ban against charging those with underlying medical conditions vastly more for their coverage.”

Tax Cut for the Rich

But if you're looking for the real reasons Republicans were throwing themselves a frat party on Thursday, heed first the words of Sister Carol Keehan, president of the Catholic Health Association of the United States: “It is critically important to look at this bill for what it is. It is not in any way a health care bill. Rather, it is legislation whose aim is to take significant funding allocated by Congress for health care for very low-income people and use that money for tax cuts for some of our wealthiest citizens. This is contrary to the spirit of who we are as a nation, a giant step backward that should be resisted.”

Then remember, as Paul Kane noted in *The Post*, that the GOP “viewed the measure as a necessary step to demonstrate some sense of momentum and some ability to govern in GOP-controlled Washington ... inside the White House, President Trump’s advisers became increasingly concerned about how little they had to show in terms of early victories.”

And so they were willing to vote for a lousy, misbegotten piece of legislation just so they could get the first round of tax cuts for the rich and to make it look as if they had accomplished something. Not exactly the Age of Pericles.

I remembered that old poem, *After Blenheim*, in which Robert Southey recounts the 1704 battle in which Britain’s Duke of Marlborough (ancestor of Winston Churchill) defeated the forces of France’s Louis XIV. The poem concludes:

“And everybody praised the Duke

Who this great fight did win.

‘But what good came of it at last?’

Quoth little Peterkin.

‘Why that I cannot tell,’ said he,

‘But ‘twas a famous victory.’”

Never confuse motion for action, Republicans. And your “famous” victory may be Pyrrhic. Fortunately, this horrible health care legislation has a long way to go through the Senate before Donald Trump gets the chance to affix his EKG-like

signature. As South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham tweeted on Friday, “A bill – finalized yesterday, has not been scored, amendments not allowed, and 3 hours final debate – should be viewed with caution.”

Perhaps the most relevant – if unintentional – comment came from Trump himself Thursday night when he told Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, “You have better health care than we do.” The Land Down Under has universal health care with a private insurance option. They call it Medicare.

If the Democrats don’t immediately start playing Trump’s statement on a constant video loop between now and November 2018, they’ve lost the will to live. The White House said Trump didn’t mean anything by it (although he then doubled down on his words with a tweet) but if you’re in the mood to have a celebration of your own, lift a glass to what he told the Australian PM and make a toast to blowing up this bogus health care reform bill and giving us what Americans truly need – Medicare for all.

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<http://billmoyers.com/story/americas-health-hands-gop-frat-boys/>

Trump’s Amateur Hour on Israel

Despite President Trump’s professed optimism, prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace remain dismal, partly because Trump shows no sign of deviating from Israel’s hard-line stance, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

President Trump’s expressed desire to resolve, somehow, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is welcome, but the grounds for skepticism about this outweigh the reasons for hope. The principal reason for skepticism is the lack of evidence that Trump has distanced himself politically from the position, embodied in the right-wing Israeli government and its most ardent American supporters, that favors perpetual Israel control of the occupied territories and, despite occasional lip service to the contrary, sees no room for Palestinian self-determination or a Palestinian state.

As a presidential candidate, Trump assumed this position after coming to terms

with Sheldon Adelson and adopting AIPAC's talking points as his own. As president, this position was manifested in his appointing as ambassador to Israel his bankruptcy lawyer, a hard-right supporter of the Israeli settlement project in the occupied territories.

This week, in a joint appearance at the White House with Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas, Trump talked in general terms about working together to reach an agreement to live in peace, and in more specific terms about defeating ISIS and security cooperation with Israel, but said nothing at all about Palestinian self-determination or a Palestinian state.

One might also wonder whether this issue will be another one that gets the amateur-hour treatment, in which the President comes to admit that, gee, this task is harder than he expected it to be. With his bankruptcy lawyer having been sent off as ambassador, Trump has turned the Israeli-Palestinian policy portfolio over to his son-in-law and his real estate lawyer.

Of course, given the many years of meager results on this subject when in the hands of supposedly experienced professionals, it might not hurt to see what the amateurs and some fresh eyes might accomplish. The real estate lawyer, Jason Greenblatt, received favorable marks from both the Israeli and Palestinian sides during a recent listening tour he made to the region.

Learning Curve

But with the learning process for this President and this administration starting almost from scratch, Trump's effort may already be behind the times. The ground has changed, and changed unfavorably, during all those years of unsuccessful peace processing. A substantial body of opinion, including opinions of many knowledgeable observers, holds that a two-state solution may already be out of reach.

Other observers hold a different opinion. It is, of course, the unilateral creation of facts on the ground, in the form of Israeli colonization through settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem – something else that Trump did not mention in his appearance this week with Abbas – that may have put a two-state solution out of reach.

The meeting with Abbas had, for similar reasons, an obsolete quality. Yes, the U.S. president must talk with Abbas in any serious attempt to make progress in resolving this conflict. But Abbas is well past his "best if used by" date. Events have been passing his part of the Palestinian leadership by, just as they have been passing by any would-be peacemakers whose understanding of the problem is based on where things stood a couple of decades ago.

Abbas has been in his position for several years beyond what was supposed to be his term of office, and in that regard his continued hanging around without benefit of re-election is an affront to the idea of democratic rule for Palestinians. He has lost much support from the Palestinian populace, a reflection of his failure to make any progress in removing from his people the yoke of Israeli occupation.

Saying this is not to cast aspersion on the character, objectives, or good will of Abbas. Rather, it is a consequence of the awkward situation thrust upon the strange entity known as the Palestinian Authority, which was supposed to be only a temporary transitional device when established in the early 1990s under the Oslo Accords. Transition to Palestinian sovereignty never occurred, and many Palestinians subsequently came to see the P.A., with good reason, as mainly an auxiliary administrator of the Israeli occupation.

A Brighter Future?

If the Palestinian people are to have a brighter future, it might need to be reached through taking another direction. We may be seeing a hint of that direction in the current hunger strike among Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. This protest is led by Marwan Barghouti, whom many have long seen as a more credible and charismatic leader than Abbas or anyone else in the P.A.

Barghouti has been described as the Palestinian Mandela; but because there does not seem to be an Israeli de Klerk among those in power in Israel, Barghouti's stature as the most credible leader of a future Palestinian state is all the more reason for Israelis opposed to creating any such state to keep him securely locked up.

The hunger strike is about conditions in prison, but it sets an example for peaceful, nonviolent protest against debilitating conditions that Israeli control imposes on all Palestinians. That raises the possibility of a major alternative to a push for a two-state solution: a struggle for equal rights for all in a single state embracing all the territory from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River.

Hamas' Declaration

On the subject of alternative leadership to the P.A., one also has to mention Hamas, which tries to administer affairs in the Gaza Strip just as the P.A. tries to do so in portions of the West Bank. Israel refuses to have any dealings with Hamas (except for negotiations about prisoner swaps), while affixing the terrorist label on Hamas and complaining about its lack of explicit recognition

of Israel.



Maintaining the miserable status of Gaza as an open air prison, including a substantial proportion of the Palestinian population while keeping it separate from the rest of Palestine, helps the Israeli government overcome the problem of how to cling to all the other territory that it wants to keep between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River without facing, at least for a while, the prospect of a Jewish minority in a state with an Arab majority.

Hamas's recent release of a document softening some of its formal positions did not really tell us much new, because the group's leadership had already made clear that it seeks political power in a Palestinian state on the territory Israel seized in 1967 and that it is quite willing to live alongside, and have an indefinite *hudna* or peace with, the State of Israel.

If founding charters and lack of explicit recognition really matter, then Hamas's positions ought not to cause any more problem than the platform of Likud, the dominant party in the ruling Israeli coalition, which explicitly rejects the very concept of a Palestinian state, strongly declares the intention to hang onto all of "Eretz Israel", and dismisses the PLO – the Palestinian negotiating party at Oslo – as an "organization of assassins". And if one is to take the "once a terrorist, always a terrorist" approach, then we should never have had anything to do with former terrorists Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir even after they became prime ministers of Israel.

Peaceful Transition?

As for that question of whether a two-state solution is still feasible, perhaps we should not think of one-state and two-states as entirely separate options. Acting on the former might be what is needed to rescue the latter, and here's why. If the prisoners' hunger strike really were to foreshadow a much

broader, and continuing, peaceful campaign on behalf of political and civil rights for all Palestinian Arabs under Israeli control, this would be a deeply discomfiting development for members of the Israeli right wing, and not only because most of them do not want to live in such a fully mixed state (with or without Gaza).

The campaign itself would throw them off balance. Peaceful protest could not plausibly be dismissed as terrorism. All the allegedly destabilizing and threatening attributes of a Palestinian state would be irrelevant arguments because a separate Palestinian state would not be what was ostensibly sought.

The appropriate role for Abbas and the Palestinian Authority would be to announce the P.A.'s dissolution, hand the keys to Area A of the West Bank back to Israel, and state the obvious: that nothing is being accomplished by the P.A. continuing to be a handmaiden to the occupation. Israel would be confronted, before its own citizens and before the world community, more squarely than ever before with the question of whether it wants democracy or wants apartheid.

This prospect might be disturbing enough for even land-craving Israeli rightists to adjust their ambitions about land and to get serious about negotiating a two-state solution – before the Israeli settlement project gets to a point at which all objective observers would agree that it has put a two-state solution beyond reach.

At least, that's an optimistic scenario. A more pessimistic scenario, even if a large peaceful civil rights campaign were to get rolling, is that the Israeli leadership would fall back on its live-by-the-sword instincts and would find ways to use its instruments of violence to upset the peaceful bandwagon. Because the stoicism of no people is infinite, there would be violence in response on the other side, and we would be back to another round of the same deadly cycle that has gone on for decades.

Probably the pessimistic scenario is the more likely one as long as power in Israel is in hands similar to those that hold power now, and as long as U.S. policy continues to provide cover for Israeli behavior that evades the tough questions about democracy and apartheid. Confronting that aspect of U.S. policy, and not just relying on inflated views of one's deal-making ability, is required if the new would-be peacemakers are to have any chance of success.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

How Trump Fixes Facts Around Policy

President Trump's disdain for inconvenient truth has led to the deletion of climate science from the EPA's web site and other moves to fix the facts around his policies, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Many of us have had more than our fill of the 100-day assessments of Donald Trump's presidency. Besides the arbitrary nature of this point on the calendar, and besides the sheer overload of the number of attempts at such a first-quarter report card, most of what gets put on such cards does not get at what is most important in evaluating any presidency.

Heavy emphasis gets placed on legislative acts. Although an ability to work with Congress is one attribute we like to see in a president, it is only one and hardly the most important one. Besides, the reasons for lack of legislative accomplishment are apt to be found less in the White House than in obduracy and dysfunction in whoever has majority control at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The artificial reporting period encourages not only silly claims about accomplishments but also an incentive to give the impression of motion and progress even when substance is lacking. The Trump White House certainly has been no exception to this pattern.

There has been, for example, the counting as an "accomplishment" the appointment and confirmation this early in the presidential term of a Supreme Court justice – without mentioning, of course, that this event was the direct result of the Republican majority in the Senate refusing for a year even to consider the previous president's nominee (and then expanding the "nuclear option" to shove through Trump's nominee). Also added to the count are executive orders that only undo something that President Obama did, or, in many cases, that order a cabinet secretary to study how something that Obama did could be undone.

Reading Trump

It's not just the White House and its supporters who have indulged in the 100-day excesses. There has been much over-analysis, sometimes tinged with either hope or worry, depending on the analyst's policy preferences, that attempts to discern larger substance and implications from individual actions or exclamations from Trump. Such attempts to extrapolate doctrine and direction from this inconsistent presidency are mostly a blood-from-a-turnip exercise.

Some lessons can indeed be drawn from the first 100 days, but with Trump the lessons are less a matter of either doctrine or accomplishment than of whether the habits, and the character and ability or lack thereof, that Trump exhibited during the campaign and in his earlier business career are continuing while he is office.

One of the best summary observations in this regard is from *Washington Post* columnist Steven Pearlstein, who writes on business and financial matters but whose conclusions could apply as well to Trump's handling of a wide range of foreign and domestic matters:

"What we know, first and foremost, is that it hardly matters what Trump says because what he says is as likely as not to have no relationship to the truth, no relationship to what he said last year during the campaign or even what he said last week. What he says bears no relationship to any consistent political or policy ideology or world-view. What he says is also likely to bear no relationship to what his top advisers or appointees have said or believe, making them unreliable interlocutors even if they agreed among themselves, which they don't.

"This lack of clear policy is compounded by the fact that the president, despite his boasts to the contrary, knows very little about the topics at hand and isn't particularly interested in learning. In other words, he's still making it up as he goes along."

Reasons to Worry

Many elements of dismay can follow from the fact of having this kind of president. We are apt to get a better idea of which specific things are most worthy of dismay as the rest of this presidency unfolds. I suggest, however, that a prime, overarching reason to worry is Trump's utter disregard for the truth. Not just a disregard, actually, but a determination to crush the truth and to instill falsehood in the minds of as many people as possible.

The *Post's* fact checker, Glenn Kessler, summarizes the situation by noting that "the pace and volume of the president's misstatements" are so great that he and other fact checkers "cannot possibly keep up." Kessler also observes how Trump's handling of falsehoods is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from the garden variety of lying in which many politicians indulge: "Many will drop a false claim after it has been deemed false. But Trump just repeats the claim over and over."

It is a technique reminiscent of the Big Lie that totalitarian regimes have used, in which the repetition and brazenness of a lie help lead to its

acceptance. The problem is fundamental, and relates to a broad spectrum of policy issues both foreign and domestic, because truth – factual reality – is a necessary foundation to consider and evaluate and debate policy on any subject.

Crushing the truth means not just our having to endure any one misdirected policy; it means losing the ability even to address policy intelligently. To the extent that falsehood is successfully instilled in the minds of enough people, the political system loses what would otherwise be its ability to provide a check on policy that is bad policy because it is inconsistent with factual reality.

Ignoring Climate Science

One hundred days is enough time for the Trumpian assault on truth to start to become institutionalized. The process has become plain at the website of the Environmental Protection Agency. Changes at the website since Trump's inauguration include not only what would be expected after a change of administrations in keeping any policy statements consistent with the new regime's preferences; it also has involved expunging the truth.

Specifically, a section of the site that had existed for 20 years and provided detailed data and scientific information on climate change has been removed. The deleted site, according to climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe of Texas Tech University, included "important summaries of climate science and indicators that clearly and unmistakably explain and document the impacts we are having on our planet."

The site was a go-to place for authoritative information about climate change. This is the sort of service one should expect to get from a government agency such as EPA (just like, before I took some recent foreign travel, the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention served as a go-to site for authoritative information about what inoculations I would need). Now that part of the EPA site is gone.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt approved the deletion because, according to an anonymous staffer under Pruitt, "we can't have information which contradicts the actions we have taken in the last two months."

So instead of defending those actions in a well-informed policy debate based on truth, the administration's approach was to delete the truth. If the policy doesn't conform with reality, then deny the reality and make it as hard as possible for citizens to be informed of the reality.

Orwell's Ministry of Truth may be closer than we thought.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is author most recently of *Why America Misunderstands the World*. (This article first appeared as a blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Government Smearing of Israel's Critics

Israel's pressure to conflate criticism of its treatment of Palestinians with the evils of anti-Semitism has stifled a needed debate in Western societies, as Lawrence Davidson explains.

By Lawrence Davidson

"Back in the day," which in this case was Feb. 8, 2007, the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism adopted a "working definition" of anti-Semitism which included the following point: It is anti-Semitic to "deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination (e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor)."

The whole definition, including the quoted sentence, was not original with the State Department. It was originally "written collaboratively by a small group of non-governmental organizations" which remained unnamed.

This "working definition" has proved to have staying power. Thus, the U.S. Congress has used the State Department document in devising its Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016, and in December of 2016, the British government adopted an almost identical "working definition," which listed the same alleged act of denial – the one that links the Jewish people's "right of self-determination" with the "claim that the existence of Israel is a racist endeavor" as an example of "contemporary anti-Semitism."

There is something not quite right about this aspect of the "working definition." The two parts of the quoted sentence don't really go together logically. Thus, labeling Israel as it presently exists as a "racist endeavor" does not "deny the Jewish people their right of self-determination." It only asserts that self-determination carried forth in a racist manner, by Jews or anyone else, is illegitimate.

Although neither the State Department's nor the U.K. government's taking up of this "working definition" are not legally binding on non-governmental individuals or organizations (a fact not widely publicized), it has allowed both

U.S. and British Zionists to label critics of Israel as anti-Semites in what appears to be a semi-official way, and this has opened the floodgates for a growing number of actions by colleges, universities, civic groups and the like to ban conferences, student organizations and speakers who would condemn Israeli behavior and support Palestinian rights.

Subsequently, the respected British jurist Hugh Tomlinson has come out with an opinion on this “working definition” which finds it flawed, and the U.K. government’s assertion of it legally unenforceable.

A Flawed Assumption

The assertion that criticism of Israel is an act of anti-Semitism relies on the assumption that, because Israel describes itself as “a Jewish state,” it represents all Jews. This exaggeration, in turn, seems reasonable due to a broader tendency, most prevalent in the democratic West, to confuse governments and the people they *claim* authority over.



Americans and most Europeans live in democracies and vote for their governments in relatively honest elections. So, aren't they in some way to be identified with the policies of their governments? The claim can be no more than partially true. Maybe an argument can be made for those who actually voted for the policymakers in a politically aware fashion. But what of those who did not vote for them? Or how about those who did not vote at all? How about those who do not reside within the country that claims them?

It is interesting to note that this identification of specific groups with specific governments is rarely made by those living in dictatorships and states with rigged elections. In those places the population knows that their wishes have no relation to policy. Often their assumption is that the same sort of disconnect is a really a worldwide phenomenon.

So, for instance, if you go to Iran, Iranians will usually tell you that they heartily dislike the U.S. government and, at the same time, really like the American people. No one believes that the two things, government and people, are really the same thing.

When it comes to populations that are spread out beyond one particular state, the exaggeration becomes even more obvious. Thus, can the Buddhist government of Sri Lanka claim the loyalty of Nepalese Buddhists for their horrible war against the Tamils? Should the ethnic Chinese living in San Francisco be expected to support the expansionist policies of the Chinese government in Tibet?

Common sense tells us that it is a gross exaggeration to identify specific ethnic or religious groups with the policies of specific governments, even democratic ones. Yet as we have seen above, in one ongoing case, that of the Jews and Israel, the argument is being pushed very strongly – to the point where laws are being considered to mandate just such an identification.

Israel De-Civilizes

Since the inception of the State of Israel, one Israeli government after the other has insisted that the Israeli state officially represents every last Jew on the planet – thus conflating nationality and religious identity. The fabricated nature of this claim has become more obvious as Israeli behavior and culture has grown ever more racist and the policies of its governments more blatantly in violation of international law and the norms of human and civil rights.

While much of the rest of the world has strived to increase diversity and tolerance, Israel and a small number of other states (such places as Myanmar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, etc.) go about practicing official discrimination, segregation, and expulsion. As they do so, they inevitably produce cultures that those who support human and civil rights can only describe as ugly and deformed. As a consequence, more and more Jews have responded by disassociating themselves with Zionist Israel.

What then has been the response of the Israeli government? It is, essentially, to spit in the face of Jews supportive of human rights. The Israelis seek to force the issue by using their influence and that of Zionist lobby surrogates to push for new laws in key foreign lands, such as the U.S. and the U.K., to make criticism of the Israeli state legally synonymous with anti-Semitism. The U.S. and British adoption of the suspect portion of the “working definition” of anti-Semitism cited here is a step in this direction, and a consequence of Zionist pressure.

It should be noted that Israel and its supporters, being the “deep thinkers” they aren’t, have created a *reductio ad absurdum* situation. To wit, anyone who publicly condemns Israeli human rights violations (that is Israeli racist acts) must be anti-Semitic (racist) – even if they happen to be Jewish. That is what you get when you pursue particularistic expediency over the general logic of tolerance and humanitarianism.

One can ask how it is that American and British, as well as other politicians and lawmakers, who are themselves part of cultures that are even now seeking to overcome racism, can buy into such an illogical argument?

Their doing so seems to be an expression of the electoral marketplace. Politicians need money to survive in their chosen career. As long as it does not cost them an overwhelming number of votes, they will sell their support to high bidders. And, no one bids higher than the Zionists.

This means that democratic politics is most often not a principled activity. It can be idealized, of course, but as long as it is dependent on incessant fund-raising, it will be corrupt in practice. That is why the Zionists can easily arrange for most Western politicians to selectively suppress free speech in their own countries and support racism in Israel.

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Demonstrating America's Need for Immigrants

President Trump has pushed for the expulsion of millions of undocumented immigrants, but they are pushing back by using May 1 to demonstrate the importance of their hard work, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The theme of May Day demonstrations in Los Angeles and elsewhere across Donald Trump's America is what a land without immigrants would be like, says Nativio Lopez, a historian on Mexican-American affairs, from the battles of Pancho Villa to the current political skirmishes between Trump and Mexico's government.

Lopez, who represents the California Congreso Latino, told me in a recent interview that he is now fighting the upsurge in deportations under the Trump administration as well as issues relating to the environment and efforts to ban the entrance of many Muslims. I spoke to Nativio Lopez in Los Angeles on April 26.

Dennis Bernstein: I want to talk to you about the big picture: What the Trump policy looks like at the macro [level] and put it into some historical context. We know in the back rooms these guys like [Attorney General Jefferson] Sessions, a life-time racist, [these] white-supremacists, who many believe want to purge as many brown people as possible, in sort of an ethnic-cleansing. Would you talk about that?

Nativio Lopez: Well, I don't have any major differences with that observation. But, I would say that it's not just characteristic of this administration, a Republican administration. The fact of the matter is it's a continuation of what we experienced for eight years under the Obama administration, of the Democratic administration, of the Democratic Party. And so immigrants find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place, between Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, enforcement quasi-light [and] enforcement heavy under Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and the Trump administration.

But it's truly a continuation of the policies that were enacted and used under the previous administration. It seems like the Trump administration, however, is moving forward on steroids the practices that were pursued under Obama. And this measure alone indicates to us that it's immigration enforcement on steroids. Under the Obama administration there was a 100 mile zone from the southern border into the interior of the United States, that if an individual [was] detained, suspected of not having immigration status, and could not prove up that he had been in the country more than two days, he could basically be detained, and removed from the country without even going before an immigration judge, not having an opportunity to retain an attorney, essentially his due process rights were eliminated.

Under the Trump administration, the executive order that was released... he essentially expanded that 100 mile zone, to coast to coast, border to border, completely in the interior, anywhere in the country, where a person could be detained and would have to prove up, that they had been in the country at least 24 months. And if they couldn't, they could then be detained and removed again, completely eliminating their due process rights. So it truly is enforcement on steroids. That's what we're facing. We call it 100 days of neo-fascism, as that applies to immigrants, 100 days of resistance.

DB: Could you talk about the... you mentioned the Bracero Program. And people

don't know history. You say you've seen this before. Could you say a little bit more about that? I know my partner here [on the show], Miguel Gavilan Molina, watched his dad dragged out and beaten in the 50's. Could you explain how there's a continuity here?

NL: Absolutely. The Bracero Program, as it was dubbed back in 1942, an agreement between the United States and Mexico, to provide workers, Mexican workers, to the United States. Not only to work in agriculture, but to work in an important industry—the railroad industry—throughout the United States. Some 3 million to 4 million Mexican immigrant guest workers, contracted workers, were brought into the United States to work in these industries. And that program lasted from 1942 to 1964.

It was essentially a servitude, labor contracting system that still exists today in much lower numbers. There's approximately 50,000 such workers that are contracted in that manner, on an annual basis, under an H2 [visa] program. And our view is essentially, or our theory, with regard to the kind of enforcement that this administration is conducting is to hit, real hard, on the immigrant community. Particularly the Mexican workers, or Central American workers, and then eventually we will see some type of legislation move through Congress, proposed by Republicans, that would essentially enact a form of guest worker program for massive numbers of workers.

For example, it's estimated that 11 million undocumented workers are in the country today, so our theory is that they will propose that [those] 11 million workers, if they want to regularize their status and obtain permanent residency status, that they would have to be in a guest worker type program, five, seven, ten years after which—and if they have a complete clean record, violated no laws, paid all their taxes—after which they would be invited to leave the United States, apply for permanent residence status, and then return back into the United States after paying a hefty fine of over a thousand dollars, for their sin of having originally entered the United States unlawfully.

If you beat someone up two years running, three years running, and then you turn around and offer them something apparently benign to have temporary status, a work permit, a social security number, the people are obviously going to be apt to jump at that opportunity, after they have been beaten up and terrorized for two or more years.

So, this is my theory of where this administration is headed. Because it absolutely knows that it depends on immigrant labor, cheap immigrant labor, to work in very important segments of the economy of the United States that are producing. Whereas manufacturing is being reduced, service employment is increasing. That's where we find immigrant labor. In agriculture, nobody can

deny that it's immigrant labor that plays a vital role of producing a bountiful harvest for California and for the country.

DB: Nativo, I'd like you to address the concept of sanctuary. We're talking about sanctuary cities, sanctuary states. Do you think it's effective, do you support it? How does that come into this, for you?

NL: The concept of sanctuary is basically a religious, a church concept, where someone could be protected on the property of the church. It's based in canon law. But what we came to know of sanctuary status, or sanctuary cities, certainly during the 1980's during the civil war in El Salvador, when many churches opened up their doors to permit Salvadoran refugees to be protected in those areas. They were essentially recognized by the immigration authorities at that time, as areas that they would not seek to enter to detain individuals that didn't have status.

This has now been re-popularized under the Trump administration, although I have to be real honest with you, where was the church or the churches raising this demand under the Obama administration that deported nearly 3 million individuals, doing the very same thing that the Trump administration is doing? So, in that sense, it's somewhat partisan. But let's say, okay, that's fine, at least they're coming out for partisan reasons. But many churches now, and advocacy organizations and legislators and Democratic politicians are calling for cities to declare themselves sanctuaries.

Effectively what it means in the practical sense is that to the full extent of the concept and the theory of sanctuary is that government authorities will not allow policing agencies, or other agencies of the government to cooperate with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] arm of the Department of Homeland Security, for the purpose of detaining and deporting individuals, residents of the state of California. In that regard, it is a measure of protection.

However, government authorities at the state level have no power to prevent federal authorities from executing warrants of detention or simply just seeking to detain individuals based on their suspicion that the individual does not have status. In that sense, Hermandad Mexicana, the California Congreso Latino, we support the effort for cities to declare themselves sanctuary.

There's legislation in the legislature of California called SB54 that would essentially declare California, doesn't have the language, but in effect it would declare California a sanctuary state. Because it would prohibit the use of any public funds by any government entity, police, sheriffs, Department of Public Social Service, or any other to cooperate with ICE in the detention and deportation of individuals. It's a buffer, if you will.

There's a lot of opposition to that legislation by the Sheriff's Association of California. And we essentially have called on communities that are facing sheriffs or policing authorities that continue to cooperate with ICE to no longer cooperate with those policing authorities, to no longer be complicit with those policing authorities, as they continue to be complicit or openly cooperate with ICE, in the detention and the deportation of members of our families. So, in concept, in theory, and as a political demand, sanctuary for all, sanctuary city, sanctuary state is very, very good. It helps rally and bring together people of like-minds that seek to protect immigrants. But, effectively, state authorities cannot prevent federal authorities from executing warrants of detention.

DB: There have been a number of arrests of people who were supposedly safe from being arrested under Obama, or under Trump, for that matter. And they're saying that there's direct retaliation for people who have spoken out for undocumented folks and others who are fighting this good fight, fighting for the rights of brown people, for the people who do some of the hardest work in this country, as you say, put the food on the table. Are you hearing about examples of retaliation for activism? You're no stranger to that, are you?

NL: No, I'm not. I'm not a stranger to that, but I'm still here and I'm still standing. They've never knocked me down. Like Jake LaMotta told Sugar Ray Robinson, "You'll never knock me down Ray, you'll never knock me down." So, we're still here in the fight. Right? And so, we have heard of cases that there have been retaliation by ICE forces throughout the country, not an abundant number of cases.

But with one case, alone, it's sufficient to tag the administration with being retaliatory against those immigrants, immigrants that are in the fight, that have become leaders, have formed organizations, that have been advocates over the last 10 – 15 years, for themselves, for their families. There have been retaliatory actions. And there has been a very, very good response by organizations and individuals reacting to the Trump administration, in conducting those types of retaliatory deportations. These are essentially... there have been people that had already been somehow in a deportation process, and therefore were required to report on an annual basis to immigration authorities. And when they went to their annual appointment, essentially they've been snatched up, and deported from the country. Certainly not given any reasons because of their activism, merely because it was time for them to go, as the administration has argued, as Sessions has argued. But most definitely it's been retaliatory.

But, notwithstanding that, we're calling on all DREAMers that have legal permits

to be in the United States, we're calling on all DREAMers and all youth to come out and march on May Day. That the best defense of themselves, as a category, as being granted status because of the overwhelming positive and progressive advocacy of organizations, churches, people throughout the country that they would obtain that status. The best defense to retain that status is to take the offense, and participate in the general organizing that's going on throughout the country, to defend the rights of immigrants, and to demand a humane and fair immigration policy, practices and eventually reform of the legislative type.

DB: I just have two more questions. One, how do you see the role, the expanding role of private prisons?

NL: Well, we know under the Bush administration that there was a strong movement to privatize the prisons. Put that in the hands for the purpose of detaining and housing, warehousing immigrants. And that, essentially, continued under Obama. The last year they contemplated perhaps bringing those back under, to the government. But that was never done. And under this administration we only see that the private prison system is going to expand.

When you calculate the number of people that they are anticipating detaining and deporting, they want to beat Obama's record. But they don't have sufficient beds to do so. So, what we're looking at is a fight by the Trump administration to get more money to expand the number of beds, to detain as short-term and long-term immigrants that are detained, certainly those that are deported, removed and then return to the United States, those individuals are going to be arrested, charged with a federal felony, and could be detained and jailed for up to five years, in a federal prison, prisons that would be privatized under this concept. A very lucrative contract.

We're also seeing that immigrants that are being detained are fighting back. We saw up in the state of Washington, over 700 immigrants, detainees, on a hunger strike fighting back because of the poor conditions, the food, services, etc. that are being provided by private contractor detention facility in the state of Washington. So, even in detention, our people are resisting.

DB: Finally, back in 2006, Nativos, there was a day without a Mexican, which brought out over 100,000 or was it a million people? Setting a historical record for people's gathering in this country. Do you expect a huge turnout? You're mentioning May Day, your thoughts on that?

NL: Well, people are telling me to scale it down because, if the turnout is not what we anticipate... in 2006 it was estimated at 1.3 million, just in the Los Angeles region alone. Throughout the country it probably exceeded more than 3 million. I can't say with all certainty that the turnout will be that size. But

it will be sizable. And one of the things that's driving that is the rhetoric, the ugliness, the hate, emanating out of the Trump administration, out of the White House.

And the fact that organizations in Los Angeles, unified, in a message of unity, repudiating the policies of the Trump administration. And that certainly helps because people on the ground are clamoring for the leadership to come together. And that essentially was accomplished here in Los Angeles, so we do expect a sizable turnout. I have to say that, just here in California alone, I know for a fact that there will be marches in San Diego, in San Bernardino, in Oxnard, in Fresno and Bakersfield, and San Francisco, Santa Rosa, many other small cities. Our people are taking to the streets on May Day demanding that immigrants be respected. And it's time that we do that because we didn't see that type of reaction and response and activity, during the Obama administration. Trump has shaken people up, like [former California Governor Pete] Wilson shook people up in 1994 with Proposition 187. And on that score that's a good thing.

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Risk of Baiting Trump on His 100 Days

As President Trump reaches the 100-day mark, the liberal and mainstream criticism is that he hasn't accomplished much, but that baiting only makes Trump likely to wage more wars and push a more right-wing agenda, says Sam Hussein.

By Sam Hussein

A CNN headline blares before the end of President Trump's "First 100 Days": "Trump's race against the clock to do something." Similarly, "Democracy Now" headlines a segment: "'It Has Not Gone Well': 100 Days of President Trump and No Major Achievements."

It certainly hasn't gone well, but Trump has in fact accomplished a great deal. For one, Neil Gorsuch was put on the Supreme Court using "pro-life" rhetoric and has already facilitated death. Gorsuch provided the deciding vote in denying convicted murderer Ledell Lee's request for a DNA test to prove his innocence because Arkansas' supply of the execution drug midazolam was nearing its expiration date. Gorsuch's ascension to the high court basically consolidates

rightwing control over all three branches of government.

Trump also has assembled an incredible cabinet of corporate bosses, Wall Street operators and pro-war apparatchiks. And he has adroitly broken the letter and spirit of virtually any positive promises he made to curtail U.S. interventionism and war-making around the world; to take on Wall Street; to up taxes on the wealthy; etc. He appears to be escalating Obama's war on whistleblowers to a war on publishers by threatening WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange.

What are euphemistically called "flip flops" are actually betrayals of the interests of most of the people who actually voted for Trump. This is a phenomenal accomplishment for a politician to have managed in his first 100 days in office.

Like Obama before him, Trump has ensured the continued solidification of an oppressive pro-war and pro-Wall Street establishment that runs at odds to the aspirations and interests of much of the U.S. public, to say nothing of the global public. By putting forward the criticism that Trump has "no major achievements," do alleged opponents of Trump pretend that they are helping prevent further damage by him?

Trump could be carrying out horrific policies but many media outlets would ignore the substance and focus on some dumb Trump comment, such as – stop the presses – the White House misidentified Steven Mnuchin as "commerce secretary" when he's actually treasury secretary. They should identify Mnuchin as a Goldman Sach insider, foreclosure king, or someone whose net financial worth – estimated at \$46 million – is only a fraction of that of Wilbur Ross, the actual commerce secretary, who has \$2.5 billion.

This non-criticism of Trump will actually empower him to do more damage. The problem here is quite similar to how George H. W. Bush was depicted early in his administration by liberals: "A wimp." The sensible media watch group FAIR even ran a piece scrutinizing the Bush administration's attempts to refashion his public image as a "rough rider." But this depiction of Bush as "a wimp" was even more consequential: it helped enable his use of military violence, with the invasion of Panama in 1989 and then the first attack on Iraq in 1990-91.

It's clear that when liberal commentator Van Jones calls Trump "presidential" because the President in an address to Congress exploited the widow of a Special Forces soldier who died in Trump's first hastily authorized military violence (a botched and bloody raid in Yemen), that the praise increased the likelihood of more violence. (Since then, Trump won widespread media praise for his hasty decision to blame Syria for the chemical-weapons incident at Khan Sheikhoun and

– without United Nations or Congressional approval – rain 59 Tomahawk missiles down on Syria, reportedly killing nine civilians, including four children.)

As Trump racks up more “accomplishments” – as he and his cabal of corporate bosses cut deals with House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell – the liberal criticism of Trump “not accomplishing anything” will deserve an assist on every one of those “accomplishments.” Mission accomplished?

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Comparing Tweeting Trump and Silent Cal

President Trump’s tax-cut plan charts a bonanza for himself, his friends and his family, getting rid of taxes that bite the rich and leaving debts behind for future American generations to pay, say Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

Republican Calvin Coolidge, who in 1923 ascended to the presidency following the death of the corrupt and dunderheaded Warren Harding, was a man of few words. But some of the most famous of the few were, “The chief business of the American people is business.”

Donald Trump, on the other hand, is often a man of many words, but rarely do they fit together to make a coherent sentence or complete thought. And we know for sure that he, too, believes the chief business of America is business, especially when it’s *his* business. Oh, and Jared and Ivanka’s, whose junkets on Dad’s behalf appear to be merchandising missions for The Trump Empire. And his two safari-loving sons still holding forth from the family palace in New York, putatively running Pop’s business while protected by a moat of barriers and security guards – take that, you huddled masses.

Coolidge was known as “Silent Cal.” When a dinner party hostess told him, “You must talk to me, Mr. Coolidge. I made a bet today that I could get more than two words out of you,” Coolidge replied, “You lose.” The last thing our current president would be described as is silent. Trump can’t stop tweeting and gibbering. And he doesn’t like losers.

The taciturn Coolidge has been described as the most conservative president in

American history. No one is quite certain what Trump is, as his opinions and moods shift depending on the last person to whom he has spoken or something he's just seen on *Fox & Friends* or heard from conspiracy theorist Alex Jones. They point rightward for sure, but as with so many conservative spokesmen these days, tinged with lunacy and utterly devoid of reason.

And yet there on the august pages of *The New York Times*, Charles R. Kesler, a senior fellow of the right-wing Claremont Institute, gushes:

"Mr. Trump remains the kind of conservative president whom one expects to say, proudly and often, 'the chief business of the American people is business.' Although Calvin Coolidge said it first, Mr. Trump shows increasing signs of thinking along broadly Coolidgean lines, and of redirecting Republican policies toward the pre-New Deal, pre-Cold War party of William McKinley and Coolidge, with its roots in the party of Abraham Lincoln."

Not Making Sense

Oh brother. Professor Kesler is projecting onto Trump a consistency of thought and belief that thus far seems unproven. Comparing him to McKinley is a stretch, and to Lincoln – well, absurd. Really now, does this remotely sound like Donald Trump?

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

On the one hand, Kesler's adoration of Trump makes sense, given that last September it was the Claremont Institute that published a pseudonymous and now-notorious essay titled "The Fight 93 Election," basically telling conservative Republicans that if they did not support Trump's presidential candidacy, their world was doomed.

Why? Because Republican opposition to Trump, the author warned, "is the mark of a party, a society, a country, a people, a civilization that wants to die. Trump, alone among candidates for high office in this or in the last seven (at least) cycles, has stood up to say: I want to live. I want my party to live. I want my country to live. I want my people to live."

Clunky pearls of wisdom from what passes today for conservatism. Where have you gone, George Will, now that they need you? Next thing we know, Ann Coulter will be running the Library of Congress.

Calvin Coolidge would never have gone for such histrionics. Yet it's worth taking a moment to consider what did occur during his administration. His years in office were the height of "The Roaring '20s" – a time of economic whoopee marked by wild financial speculation, extravagant bank loans and debt that contributed to the 1929 market crash and the Great Depression.

Coolidge himself was the epitome of frugality and respectability but like Donald Trump (who fancies himself "the king of debt," by the way – a real conservative, no?) he favored enormous tax cuts, slashing spending, high tariffs on imports and cramming regulatory agencies with pro-business types.

Unlike Trump, he favored a low profile and as far as policy goes preferred inertia to action. Here's what the noted columnist Walter Lippmann said at the time: "This active inactivity suits the mood and certain of the needs of the country admirably. It suits all the business interests which want to be let alone.... And it suits all those who have become convinced that government in this country has become dangerously complicated and top-heavy...."

At that last part, you can just see all Trump's plutocratic Cabinet members and advisors nodding their heads in vigorous agreement.

When he died, Calvin Coolidge's net worth was less than a million in 2016 dollars and he left it all to his wife Grace. Trump, who says his net worth may be as much as \$10 billion (how can we hope to know if he won't release his tax returns?), and his family are using the White House to make the family fortune multiply, as if the presidency were a perpetual goose laying golden eggs. Each news cycle brings more stories of conflicts of interest, and the tax cut plan announced on Wednesday is a sweeping bow to the rich.

"It is striking," Neil Irwin at *The New York Times* noted, how much the proposal favors Trump and his kin: "He is a high-income earner. He receives income from 564 business entities, according to his financial disclosure form, and could take advantage of the low rate on 'pass-through' companies. According to his leaked 2005 tax return, he paid an extra \$31 million because of the alternative minimum tax that he seeks to eliminate. And his heirs could eventually enjoy his enormous assets tax-free."

So conservatism under Trump and his cronies now running government has brought back a revised version of the gold standard: How much gold you can mine from privatizing the mother lode of government is the mark of your success.

No wonder Trump admires Vladimir Putin so much: They are the Midas and Ali Baba of autocracy. But conservatives they are not, unless to conservatives greed has become the coin of the realm.

One more thing: President Trump doesn't sleep much at night, reportedly getting about five hours of shut-eye (obviously, the cause is not a guilty conscience). President Coolidge loved to sleep, as much as twelve hours at a time. When he awoke from a White House nap he often would ask his butler, "Is the country still there?"

He meant it as a joke. Today, the question isn't funny.

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