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Why Pence Might be Even Worse Than Trump

By Pete Dolack
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The thought of Donald Trump's monstrous ego being swiftly turned out of office because of his incompetence and corruption can't help but give us a warm feeling of schadenfreude. Yet contemplating his possible impeachment gives full meaning to the idea of being careful of what you wish.

The complicating factor here is that an impeachment and removal from office would elevate Christian fundamentalist Mike Pence to the presidency. That would be truly a horrifying development. Not only because Vice President Pence is more of a “true believer” in the extreme Right agenda than is President Trump but as an experienced legislator and governor, he’d likely be far more effective in steering bills through Congress.

With some of the most ideological Republicans in control of all three branches of government, and given that the Democratic Party has shown no sign whatsoever of learning from last year’s electoral debacle, hoping for relief from traditional politics seems even more hopeless than it is ordinarily. What to do? Even the ongoing campaign to “Refuse Fascism” by “driving out the Trump/Pence regime” has a controversial element to it. Although appropriately aimed at both while targeting the system that could elevate such horrors to the apex of political power, this sort of campaign spreads confusion by equating what is a particularly nasty manifestation of capitalist formal democracy with full fascism.

Let’s step back for a moment and remember a bit of history. In the last years of Weimar Germany, the Communist Party of Germany maintained a rigid sectarian line that focused its attacks not on the Nazis, but at Social Democracy. The Social Democrats were scorned as “social fascists,” and the coalition governments of Social Democrats and its moderate Right allies denounced as “objectively fascist” already. Instead of a united front against the Nazis, the only strategy that could have defeated Hitler before Hindenburg appointed him chancellor, energy was dissipated in sectarian sniping.

When the Nazis took power, they wasted no time rounding up Communists and Social Democrats, sending them to the first concentration camps. Of course, it was the Social Democrats who paved the road for the Nazis through their continual reliance on the right-wing death squads known as the “Free Corps” who would later become the seeds for Hitler’s storm troops.

The difference between a miserable, politically bankrupt bourgeois government and a fascist government was hammered home the hard way. Let us not make the same mistake now. Donald Trump’s ascension carries the seeds of a potential fascist movement but it is not actually fascist; thus far it is a conventional Republican administration in its policies, albeit one more extreme and incompetent than even the Bush II/Cheney administration. That is more than enough reason to organize with urgency, going beyond demonstrations to building organized movements. But if both Trump and Pence were removed from office before their terms were up, then House Speaker Paul Ryan would take office. Hardly an improvement!

The bar is mighty low indeed when Speaker Ryan, capable of little more than robotically repeating the lines he’s been fed by the Koch brothers, can, with a straight face by corporate-media commentators, be considered an “intellectual.” As the Green Party activist Paul Gilman jokes, “Ryan is considered an intellectual by Republicans because he’s read both of Ayn Rand’s novels.”

None of the foregoing in any way is an attempt to discourage the work of Refuse Fascism, or anybody else organizing against the Trump administration. We need more of this kind of work

— especially work that targets capitalism instead of focusing on personalities. For our ability to limit the damage from the White House and its congressional enablers will depend on the intensity and effectiveness of our organizing.

A general in the Republican war on women

Circling back to Vice President Pence, it would be nearly impossible to overstate his extremism. In public speeches, he has said he is “a Christian, a conservative and a Republican in that order.” Like many evangelical Christians, he believes he has a right to impose his religious beliefs on everyone else, and as Indiana governor passed a law intended to do that. As a *Daily Kos* report put it:

“He has repeatedly claimed that he should make policies and pass laws that are in accordance with his faith. The evangelical church Mike Pence has been attending teaches that marriage is only between one man and one woman. The wife must be submissive to her husband. All women are expected to submit humbly to the teachings of Christian men.”

The church he attended in Indianapolis openly calls for a theocratic state, believing the Bible should be taken literally:

“We believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original manuscripts and the sufficient and final authority for all matters of faith, practice, and life.”

And this church asserts that not only should women be “deferential” to men and be “guided” toward marriage and away from a career, but that this applies to all women, whether or not church members. The *Daily Kos* article notes that a foundational book used by the church

“does not distinguish between conduct expected from women in voluntary marriages and unrelated women who may be members of another faith. This book teaches that preferences of women from different faiths (or no faith) are simply wrong and need to be corrected by the older women.”

And thus it is no surprise Vice President Pence would so distinguish himself for his crusades against women. As a member of Congress, he led fights to defund Planned Parenthood. Upon becoming Indiana governor, he cut Planned Parenthood funding by more than half and cut funding for domestic-violence programs. The slashing of funding for Planned Parenthood forced five non-abortion clinics that provided testing for sexually transmitted diseases to close, leading to an increase in HIV infections so severe that federal intervention was required. As the health crisis began to spiral out of control, local public health officials suggested using a needle exchange and harm-reduction program to combat it, but Pence refused, allowing the crisis to worsen.

As member of Congress, he co-sponsored a bill allowing hospitals to turn away women in need of life-saving abortions, and another bill that would have designated fertilized eggs as people with legal rights.

As governor, he signed into law a measure requiring fetal tissue from abortions to be buried or cremated, which was suspended by a federal judge before it could go into effect. The law would also have imposed rules designed to seriously impede the right to an abortion and subject doctors to potential jail terms. And it was under Pence's governorship that Purvi Patel was given a since-reduced 20-year prison sentence for a miscarriage, after prosecutors claimed she had induced a "late" abortion.

A general in the war on gays and lesbians

In an Orwellian touch, then Indiana Governor Pence signed into law the "Religious Freedom Restoration Act." The act does not grant freedom of religious belief, already strictly enforced and one that governments and courts bend over backwards to support, but rather was intended to allow evangelicals to force their religious beliefs on others. The law would have trampled on the rights of others, such as allowing businesses to refuse services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, similar to Southern businesses being allowed to refuse service to African-Americans.

The Human Rights Campaign, in a report analyzing the Indiana law and other similar laws around the country, wrote:

"These bills are often incredibly vague and light on details — usually intentionally. In practice, most of these bills could empower any individual to sue the government to attempt to end enforcement of a non-discrimination law. The evangelical owner of a business providing a secular service can sue claiming that their personal faith empowers them to refuse to hire Jews, divorcees, or LGBT people. A landlord could claim the right to refuse to rent an apartment to a Muslim or a transgender person."

Swift public pressure and announced boycotts led to a revision allegedly softening the law, but the intention is clear. A President Pence would surely feel emboldened to attempt such a law on the national level.

His animus toward the LGBTQ community is so severe that he tried to block federal funding of HIV treatments unless they came with a requirement to advocate against same-sex relationships. He opposes non-straight people serving in the military, going so far as to claim that "Homosexuality is incompatible with military service because the presence of homosexuals in the ranks weakens unit cohesion."

A crusader against science

Not surprisingly for someone who believes in the Bible as the sole source of truth and law, Vice President Pence is no fan of science. He doesn't believe in evolution or global warming. On evolution, a *Think Progress* analysis notes:

"Speaking with an inflection many evangelicals would recognize in their pulpits, Pence advocated in 2002 for changing science textbooks to describe evolution as merely one 'theory'

among many, and suggested including ‘intelligent design’—a school of thought similar to Christian Creationism—alongside the work of Charles Darwin.

‘The truth is [evolution] always was a theory,’ he said. ‘And now that we’ve recognized evolution as a theory, I would simply and humbly ask: can we teach it as such? And can we also consider teaching other theories. ... Like the theory that was believed in by every signer of the Declaration of Independence? The Bible tells us that God created man in his own image, male and female he created them—and I believe that.’ ”

Vice President Pence’s hostility to science has apparently prevented him from understanding that human knowledge has progressed since the 18th century. That is of no consequence because God gave him the ability to read the minds of people dead more than 200 years.

And as to global warming, perhaps here the concerns of his billionaire backers are intermingled with his religious obscurantism. He once wrote an essay in which he said: “Global warming is a myth. The global warming treaty is a disaster. There, I said it.” Putting “greenhouse gases” in quotation marks (maybe he didn’t take chemistry in high school?), he assured his potential voters that the Earth had actually cooled over the previous 50 years. In a truly marvelous piece of perfect ignorance, he wrote:

“[T]he greenhouse gases alluded to are real but are mostly the result of volcanoes, hurricanes and underwater geologic displacements. Regrettably, none of these causes can be corralled by environmentalists hungry for regulation and taxes and, therefore, must be ignored.”

Funded by the Koch brothers

The Koch brothers must have been proud of him. He certainly has proved to be a winning investment for them. One of the brothers, David Koch, donated \$300,000 to Pence’s gubernatorial bids, and there are strong ties. A 2014 *Politico* article reported:

“A number of Pence’s former staffers from his days in Congress have assumed major roles in the brothers’ corporate and political spheres. And Americans for Prosperity, the Kochs’ top political group, has been holding up Pence’s work in Indiana as emblematic of a conservative reform agenda they’re trying to take nationwide. ... Pence has worked to spotlight the fiscal issues that animate the Kochs’ political giving. People close to the brothers say he first earned their network’s admiration during the George W. Bush years, when he opposed what he deemed Big Government policies backed by his own party, including No Child Left Behind and a Medicare expansion, and repeatedly warned that the GOP was veering off course.”

The Bush II/Cheney administration was too liberal! Something else to keep in mind should Vice President Pence gain even more power than he already has. Given his ability to understand how government works, he would likely be more effective at ramming through far Right wish lists than Trump. A Republican consultant quoted by *The Guardian* backed this opinion:

“Pence has outstanding relationships with the GOP leadership on Capitol Hill of all stripes, not just the social conservatives. So there’d be clear alignment and rapid progress on healthcare,

taxation, and many other key policy initiatives that have eluded the party over the past months as a result of Trump's unorthodox approach.”

To what extent the policies of the Trump administration are those of Mike Pence and what policies are those of White supremacist chief strategist Steve Bannon are difficult to know. Perhaps they have separate spheres of influence or, as is likely, there is considerable overlap in their agendas. The draconian budget proposed by the Trump administration on May 23 has the fingerprints of the budget director, Mick Mulvaney, a far right ideologue himself, but it is likely the vice president had much say in it — the punishments intended to be administered to people for the crime of being poor are certainly consistent with his style.

Given that Donald Trump doesn't have the intellectual capacity or attention span to actually be president, and appears to rely heavily on a small coterie, Mike Pence likely is already directing much policy. There is nothing to choose between the two. We don't have to declare them fascists to find them plenty scary enough. (You are, after all, reading this on your computer screen at your leisure rather than having this conversation in a concentration camp. And by this point, Hitler had already consolidated his dictatorship with political opponents and union officials murdered or in camps.)

We have all the reasons we could want to oppose the Trump administration at every step. An *administration*, not one personality. There is no reason to think ousting President Trump would lessen the danger to the world he presents, and could actually have the counter-intuitive effect of increasing it. Organize!