

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نياشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/08/15/fascism-here-we-come-the-rise-of-the-reactionary-right-and-the-collapse-of-the-left/print/>

Fascism Here We Come: the Rise of the Reactionary Right and the Collapse of “The Left”

By Anthony DiMaggio
August 15, 2017



The white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia over this last weekend is an important moment in American politics, symbolizing the ascendance of the reactionary right and showcasing the dangers of its toxic assault on democracy, equality, and the rule of law. News outlets on early Sunday reported that one person was killed on August 12th after a car

accelerated into a crowd of counter-protestors, while dozens more were injured. That intimidation, terror, and murder are tools of the reactionary right in their war on people of color and non-Christians is nothing new in history. Still, the most recent wave of right-wing hate is instructive, offering numerous lessons regarding the state of American politics.

First, the incident reveals that right-wing fascism has officially “arrived” on the American political scene, as seen in Trump’s refusal to condemn the murders. Trump knows he can’t afford to alienate racist elements on the right to get re-elected, and he doesn’t want to alienate them, since he himself is a racist and a bigot. Hence the refusal to use clear language to condemn the murders. His political reasoning here is completely transparent, as he’s spent his entire political career cultivating hate on the reactionary right. Although Trump eventually condemned the attack after receiving a large amount of negative press, his reversal is part of a broader trend Trump is known for, in which he initially signals to racists in his support base that he approves of their actions, thereby devaluing any later reversal as merely the product of political pressure, rather than principled opposition. The damage, of course, has already been done. Far-right fascists and racists know that the president supports their behavior when he goes out of his way to provide them cover.

The second lesson from this tragedy relates to the futility of claims that Trump and his far-right supporters are the sort of people with which “the left” should be working. First, there’s the claim among numerous “left” pundits that Trump’s campaign represented the rise of working class populism, the implication being that Trump himself was a working class hero set on restoring America’s past economic greatness. Other nonsense abounded about Trump the principled anti-imperialist, but that rhetoric is contradicted by his administration’s belligerent rhetoric and nuclear threats toward North Korea, his militarism in Syria, and his embrace of increased sanctions against Russia. The rhetoric about Trump the economic populist is contradicted by his record since taking office of embracing typical corporatist Republican policies, including deep cuts in social welfare spending, deregulation of big business, and efforts to ram through tax cuts for the wealthy.

It would be silly and wrong to say that all Trump supporters are right-wing fascists or extremists. Many are simply conservatives who do not embrace racism or bigotry. According to data from the Pew Research Center and elsewhere, while two-thirds to three quarters of Trump supporters embrace reactionary and bigoted social views, the quarter to third do not. Still, the recent push among numerous “leftists” to seek an alliance between the left and the far right (a “Brown-Red” alliance) is worrisome considering the growing data suggesting the right-wing elements of Trump’s support base are out-and-out fascists.

Three recent surveys raise alarm bells on the Trump-fascist front. First, there was a poll reported in the Washington Post which found that a plurality of Trump voters believed that white Americans face “a lot of discrimination” in the United States. Comparatively, just 19 percent said “Latino people” face “a lot of discrimination,” while just 22 percent felt the same about “black people.” These results suggest mass delusion on the part of much of Trump’s base, considering the mountain of social science data demonstrating that people of color are systematically discriminated against in the mass media, on the job market, in the criminal justice

system, and in other social settings. This paranoia is no doubt feeding the reactionary right's escalation of the "culture war" against people of color.

A second recent poll suggests that much of Trump's support base has fallen into a cultish relationship with the president, expressing a blind trust for "The Donald" and authoritarian contempt for the press. As the Economist reports, nearly half of Republican Americans now believe that the government should "shut down" news media outlets for "broadcasting stories that are biased or inaccurate," while over half think these outlets should be fined for allegedly pushing falsehoods – the First Amendment be damned. If these reactionaries get their way, government will be empowered to decide what constitutes responsible or accurate journalism. Cultish support for Trump is most evident in the Economist's polling of trust for Trump, in comparison to trust of various media outlets. Three-quarters of Republicans state they trust Trump more than each of the following news outlets: CNN, the New York Times, and the Washington Post. While conservatives have long lambasted these outlets for their alleged liberal bias, the same cannot be said for other outlets, including the neoconservative Weekly Standard and the National Review. But three-quarters of Republicans say they have more trust in Trump than these outlets. More than half of Republicans express greater trust in Trump than Fox News.

Mass blind trust in a political leader – especially a con-man as narcissistic, duplicitous, and shamelessly deceptive as Trump – raises dire concerns about the ability of critical literacy skills to survive moving forward. When citizens favor blatant propaganda as their primary source of information about the world, there is little hope that they will be able to separate themselves from reactionary, officially-endorsed fascism. The cult of Trump will provide cover for an administration that has long expressed contempt for freedom of the press, and is now indicating its support for fascist policies aimed at criminalizing journalists for reporting on classified intelligence the Trump administration would prefer be kept secret.

A final red flag is raised regarding a new poll reported on by the Washington Post, which finds that 52 percent of Republicans would support postponing the 2020 presidential election if Trump says it is necessary to root out voter-fraud before allowing a vote, while 56 percent say that shutting down elections is acceptable so long as Republicans in Congress agree. No matter that Trump has presented no evidence of rampant voter fraud in the last election, or that the political experts who actually study the issue conclude that voter fraud amounts to a miniscule and trivial amount of all votes cast. In a political world in which Lord Trump's word is gospel, and media outlets challenging his propaganda are heretics, the truth no longer matters.

The organized left has been in serious trouble for years, which is evident in the decline of labor unions, the disappearance of leftist public intellectuals in academia, the rightward drift of the Democratic Party, and the complete failure of the Green Party to make inroads with the mass public. There are of course some positive signs, as seen in the rise of Black Lives Matter and protests against the Trump administration – particularly those protests that provide a constructive agenda by supporting greater government funding for education and the introduction of universal health care.

Despite these positive developments, much of "the left" – if one could call them that, have turned to increasingly desperate statements and actions in an effort to become relevant again to

American politics. This desperation manifests itself in numerous forms. First, there is the trend toward dealing with the Trump administration and reactionary supporters with kid's gloves, downplaying the importance of the right's bigotry and prejudice, as seen not only in racist and xenophobic rhetoric, but policies that discriminate against Muslims, people of color, and immigrants. Some have claimed that Trump should be supported by leftists because of his election rhetoric about returning jobs to America, in opposition to free trade, and in support of normalizing relations with Russia. None of this rhetoric has manifested itself in tangible policy proposals or actual policies, now more than half a year into this administration, which is a sign of how little commitment Trump had to these positions. As it's become harder and harder to maintain the myth that Trump's electoral victory was a product of mounting anger among a working class left behind in the era of outsourcing and free trade, some on "the left" have tried to promote a "Brown-Red" alliance agenda by claiming that the far right can join with the far left to fight oppression and defeat the liberal media and the "deep state."

Now some Green Party personalities and some of their "public intellectual" supporters who are nominally on the left seek to make common cause with openly white nationalist reactionaries. This development demonstrates a serious intellectual decline in what counts for "the left." By downplaying the severity of the racist, sexist, classist, and xenophobic tendencies of the far-right and the reactionary elements of Trump's base, individuals who claim to support the left betray the long history of resistance to bigotry, prejudice, and oppression that has historically defined progressive social movements. Any sane person should want to have nothing to do with right-wing bigots or fascists, although this point has been obscured in talk of a "Brown-Red" alliance.

The decision by Cobb and McKinney to ally with fascists is a serious betrayal of progressive values. It harms the credibility of anyone on the left who still claims the mantle of the democratic, anti-racist politics. The Green's alliance will not be forgotten by people of color, immigrant rights groups, and those opposing America's Islamophobic turn. One can't realistically "work with" right-wing nationalists one minute, then claim common cause with minority groups that are the targets of reactionary fascists.

Much of what remains of "the left" today is comprised of anxious, angry individuals who are rightly angry at a dysfunctional political-economic system that fails to represent the needs of the bottom 99 percent. These individuals often feel deeply isolated from American mainstream society, and unfortunately, have been willing to gravitate toward all types of kooky ideas due to the decline of left-public intellectualism in the neoliberal era. As public educational institutions have been dismantled and privatized, professors have been pressured and bullied by administrators and state officials to abandon advocacy work. And with the decline of American labor unions, productive venues for progressive activism have also begun to dry up.

Conspiratorial and extremist personalities have stepped forward to fill the left vacuum. "Left" thinkers embrace authoritarian false prophets such as Assad in Syria and Putin in Russia, and portray these faux revolutionaries as on the vanguard of "anti-imperialism," despite their repressive domestic human rights records, simply because they are against American militarism. Others on the left fall into conspiracism, embracing 9/11 trutherism, and various "deep state" conspiracies such as claims that a secret intelligence apparatus was responsible for the JFK assassination and for framing Nixon for Watergate. Never mind that there is a federal recording

(made by Nixon himself) in which the former president openly speaks about paying off the Watergate burglars with hush money; we wouldn't want to let evidence get in the way of a good conspiracy.

With the rise of "Brown-Red" alliance propaganda, some "leftists" have thrown their lot in with truly despicable individuals. For example, McKinney and Cobb have recently sought to make common cause with noted Alex Jones groupies such as Mike Cernovich and Robert Steele, both with deeply troubled histories of embracing white nationalism. Cernovich shamelessly embraces the rhetoric of "alt-right" sexists, referring to men he deems insufficiently masculine as "cucks," while embracing conspiracy theories such as Pizzagate, and advocating IQ testing for immigrants. He has claimed that date rape is not real, and has encouraged men to "slut shame" black women to avoid AIDS. Steele is a David Duke sympathizer who publishes commentary along with Duke about the dangers of the "Zionist deep state," as tied to conspiracies about how Jews control American politics, media, and banking institutions. Steele gained infamy after an appearance on Alex Jones' Info Wars claiming that NASA was running a child slavery ring on Mars. And Steele explicitly compares Jews to animals, although I will not do him or Duke the favor of linking to any of his repulsive commentaries. Echoing Steele's anti-semitism, McKinney also has a long, sordid history of collaborating with blatant anti-semites, despite the presence of many anti-Zionist activists and intellectuals throughout the U.S. and the world who reject anti-semitism.

I've recently heard from numerous self-described leftists who defend the supporters of the "Brown-Red" alliance agenda, but the moral bankruptcy of these apologists' claims have been stripped bare considering the wretched politics of individuals like Steele and Cernovich. Steele has reached out to me in the past, seeking to recruit me in his battle against "the deep state." It was immediately clear that there was something very wrong with this man, which was apparent when he started spouting "deep state" conspiracies about Watergate, 9/11, and JFK. Not yet knowing about his anti-semitism, I politely told him I had no interest in anything he was selling. That Green Party leaders could be supportive of such a figure speaks poorly of their judgment.

Marginalized from access to mainstream political, economic, or media institutions, some claiming to speak for "the left" have concluded that the path forward is in allying with fascist forces on the right. This act of desperation reveals the utter failure of the Green Party to make serious inroads with the public or in gaining political power. But this Hail Mary is destined to fail. No progressive social movement is ever going to be built by propping up reactionary bigots and conspiracy theorists, who have zero interest in the fight against economic inequality, racism, and capitalism more broadly. Progressively minded people would be far better served opposing the relatively small number of Americans who openly advocate reactionary white nationalism, and instead focusing on the millions of people of color, in addition to working class, middle class, and poor Americans who are all increasingly left behind in an era of growing corporate, plutocratic power over politics. There is still time to return respectability to the progressive community in America, but this can't happen so long as fascist enablers speak for the left.