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Mr. Trump Goes to Kensington



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The election of Donald Trump should have forced broad reconsideration of the American project. Whatever the factors one chooses to explain his political ascension, he comes from outside the realm of ordinary expectations. However, in Mr. Trump's case, it is the expectations that are skewed. In a world run by and for the rich, less probable explanations of how wealth and power are achieved predominate.

Regularly repeated phrases like 'not normal' and 'normalization' are used to draw a distance that doesn't exist. Mr. Trump is so normal as to be absolutely tedious. He's half

of the asshole bosses many of us have ever had. It is his very normality that so offends bourgeois sensibilities. In a world populated by genetic scientists and derivatives traders, how, precisely, could this tacky loser become boss of it all?

Left unstated is that as inconvenient as it is for all involved, Donald Trump is iconic in the sense of completely and accurately representing his class in this time and place. Ugly— yes; relentlessly self-interested— yes; wholly transactional in his dealings with other human beings— yes; barbaric in exploiting social vulnerabilities for personal gain— YES!

It is this iconic status that Mr. Trump's liberal critics either don't understand or find it convenient to forget. Through inheritance, making ill-informed decisions is his birthright. Born into a position where wealth and power are transferred upward, the young Trump long ago positioned himself to represent the virtues of modern American state-corporatism.

Early in his career he used the tools available to him—ascendant finance and state support for private power, to muscle his way past labor unions and recalcitrant zoning boards to build monuments to the worldview from whence he emerged. He embodies the ethos of an era that should have ended around 2009. But it didn't. It was brought back to life. By a Democrat.

In that era, being dictatorial was evidence of leadership ability. Failing upward was a perquisite of inherited position. Dodging taxes, filing strategic bankruptcies and enriching oneself at the expense of others were standard practice. The charge that Mr. Trump is corrupt represents a change in social etiquette. Phrased differently, he accurately reflects the ethos of his time and place.

The gaudy Trump so offends bourgeois sensibilities that a fantasy of alien provenance was created to prevent cognitive dissonance. An evil emperor from a far way land installed the all-too-American Trump to make people have unpleasant thoughts about others who we Americans have always been kind to. The bourgeois, in particular, only want to bomb little Sancho's village and overthrow his government to install a narco-state dictatorship when Democrats are in office.

With cognitive dissonance ascendant, what the urban bourgeois apparently don't remember and / or understand is that Mr. Trump is exactly who and what Barack Obama bailed out in 2009. The value of Mr. Trump's urban real estate and 'branding' have

always been determined by how much funny-money Wall Street pumps into ‘the economy.’

Had it not been for Saint Barack, the guardian angel of Wall Street, Donald Trump would today be bossing pigeons around some urban park boring everyone within earshot with tales of how he used to be somebody. Alternatively, make a list of the classy, intelligent, caring and socially aware oligarchs that Mr. Obama saved and share it with the world.

The political problem with launching personal attacks is 1) they are by definition anti-political and 2) they function without context. The New York Times published a lengthy expose of the Trump family’s business dealings and the process by which Mr. Trump inherited his fortune. And it put the findings forward as if they were unique to Mr. Trump.

In fact, none other than the New York Times corporation is a family dynasty run by inheritance wastrels whose fortunes are tied to serving power. Illuminating the mechanisms by which previously-owned wealth is redistributed is a worthy endeavor. However, limiting the critique to personal invective— a battle between competing oligarchs, undermines the systemic critique.

The systemic critique is that American capitalism is a rigged game created by the rich to make themselves richer. They perpetuate this system through the mythology that skill, intelligence and hard work explain their good fortune. In fact, America is a gangster state born of slavery and genocide that rules the world through brutality and plunder. And ‘markets.’

The U.S. is amongst the largest tax havens in the world. Fortune Magazine’s Billionaire List is populated by people who either inherited their wealth or used state-granted monopolies to preclude market competition. Besides wisdom in choosing one’s parents, using state power to give oneself unfair advantage in commerce is something that the rich have outsized power to do.

Again, the political problem is that Democrats either know this, making narrow charges of corruption against Mr. Trump a partisan political ploy, or they don’t, making them ignorant of the base facts about which they claim to speak. Astonishingly, or possibly a testament to their ingenuity, establishment Democrats appear to hold both of these positions simultaneously.

A lot of the people who voted for Mr. Trump no doubt bought his explanation of his personal ‘success’ because it fits what they have been told about how the world works. ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) and the Chamber of Commerce have been selling this bullshit at the state and local level for five decades or more.

The Democrats’ answer to ‘why Trump?’ was Russiagate, identity politics and a reassertion of American exceptionalism. In other words, their answer to Mr. Trump was to honor him. What could be more Trumpian than fear mongering of carefully chosen others for political gain, targeted social outrage that keeps the existing distribution of power unchanged and intellectual gravitas in the service of The Golden Nugget and the DeVos fortune?

The more relevant question is of neoliberalism: if it worked, then why in the fuck was Goldman Sachs competing with little Stacy Crutchbottom, the winner of the Miss Kidney Bean contest at the Iowa State Fair, for government funding in 2009? As it turned out, Wall Street saw an opportunity— an approximately \$19 trillion opportunity, and they took it.

The era that Mr. Obama ushered in was a new grift for Democrats—‘Cracker Joe’ Biden was deemed the face of racial reconciliation. On the rare occasions when Bill Clinton wasn’t raping someone, Democrats proclaimed themselves to be the party of gender equality. Mr. Obama had already proved that Americans would elect a black neoliberal tool— twice.

So why not put ‘super-predators,’ the 1994 Crime Bill, mass incarceration, opposition to racial integration and the Dixiecrats in the past to become the party of tolerance? At a minimum, the move would help rich, white, liberal donors feel better about their business practices. And it could even garner votes from people so traumatized by American racial history that the lesser evil allows them to sleep at night.

What should have followed Mr. Trump’s election was capitulation to certain knowledge that neoliberalism has been a disaster for all but the very rich. Republicans won’t capitulate because their donors have wildly benefited from it. Establishment Democrats won’t capitulate for the same reason, and because Saint Barack dedicated his entire eight years to reviving it. It seems that failure isn’t an orphan after all.

Donald Trump is a mystery only through the extraordinary efforts taken to hide the nature of the world he inhabits. What fantastical mythology could convert an inheritance wastrel

who used local, state and Federal government to fail upwards into a self-made entrepreneur whose wisdom and street smarts placed him at the pinnacle of American wealth and power?

With apologies, a paragraph or two of economics is in order to help un-clarify the issues. Capitalist theory can't explain the existence of the state, so the default position is a sectoral view— public / private and political / economic. Contradicting this theory is the history of capitalist development. Mercantilism, state-capitalism, is posed as an intermediate step in capitalist development. It broadly explains the Chinese model of managed economic development of recent decades.

The capitalist conceit is that at some point the state stops 'interfering' in markets to make the private sector the sole engine of economic development. The problem with this explanation is partly theoretical— how do capitalists and capital accumulation drive economic production when the state is at the center of it?

And the problem is partly distributional— why do capitalists get to reap outsized shares of what is produced when the state organizes and funds the productive core? A contemporary example of this is China. The Chinese government has explicitly led and funded— through state and state-related banks, the largest and fastest 'capitalist' development effort in human history.

Markets had nothing to do with it. Neither did capitalists. Why does, five decades into the neoliberal revolution, the Pentagon remain a government vehicle for economic development? Who created the internet? Why does the government create technologies and then pass them off to 'private' interests to be brought to market?

When Ronald Reagan entered office, he cut taxes while greatly increasing government spending through the military— so-called military Keynesianism, to perpetrate the fraud that his tax cuts— and not government spending, boosted economic output. If he had believed his own bullshit, increasing government spending would have hampered the effect of lowering corporate taxes.

Neither Reagan nor Maggie Thatcher 'shrank' government as promised. They just transferred its ownership, scope and purpose to private hands. School privatization didn't end public funding of schools. It handed it over to connected capitalists to be milked for profits. Privatization of the military didn't end public funding either. 'Private' corporations were given public funding with a guaranteed 'profit.'

The world in which Donald Trump arose should be coming into focus here. Tax abatements for real estate developers are an accounting gimmick to pose public funding of private interests as taxes not received, rather than as government expenditures. In poor neighborhoods, funding that could help poor people goes instead to corporate and suburban landlords who receive tax breaks that they can use against income received from other sources.

To quote the punk band Crass, it's a joke, it's all a fucking joke. Donald Trump is a con man. But the whole system he represents is a con. The problem for Democrats, liberals and the American bourgeois is that Mr. Trump is one of you. Not exactly one of you. He was born a winner and you weren't. But that's close enough.

Without addressing the systematic reasons why Donald Trump and his class of dim blowhards rule the world, they will continue to do so. The Democrats' scam is that they only want to change which dim blowhards are in power, not the system. Look at their votes to give Mr. Trump more power. Look at who they have deciding public policy. Barack Obama's 'legacy' achievement was to be the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership), a scam / scheme to give the Donald Trumps of the world— the oligarchs, more power.

On a slightly more positive note, Bernie Sanders represents an opportunity of sorts, one that the powers that be are too 'preoccupied' to avail themselves of. Comparisons of Mr. Sanders to Donald Trump illustrate what we are up against. You'd best believe that 90%+ of the bourgeois have no cognizance of what made Mr. Trump. In their view, were Mr. Trump to talk a nicer game, he would do just fine.

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