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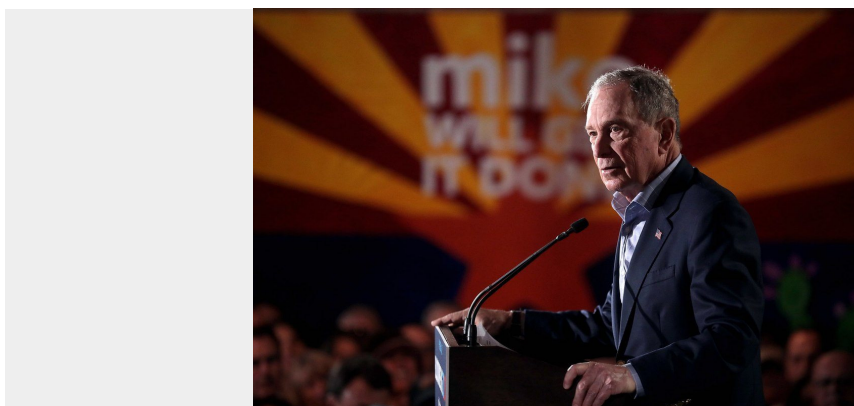
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## Mayor Mike, Worse Than Mayor Pete



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The good news out of New Hampshire was, of course, that Bernie Sanders won – not by much, but by enough to leave no doubt as to who the winner was. There was more good news as well: Joe Biden, the former king of the moderates, is on his way to becoming toast.

The bad news is that the campaign of the only candidate besides Bernie worth taking seriously, Elizabeth Warren, is now on life support. Worse still, Pete Buttigieg's candidacy shows no signs of tanking.

If there must be moderates nipping at Sanders' heels, better Amy Klobushar than Mayor Pete. Her politics may even be worse than his, but she has more experience, more gravitas, more of the common touch, and, best of all, she is a she.

Hard as they are to stomach, it is probably a good thing that moderates are still in the running and also that they are divided among themselves. As long as one or another of

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them could still take over the role formerly played by Biden, and as long as it remains unclear which one it will be, the worse Mike Bloomberg's prospects become. Better division than unity in the moderate camp, and, of the moderates still in contention, better any of them than he.

Their politics is mainstream Democratic; Bloomberg is essentially an old school Republican.

He hates Trump, the worst American president ever, but he loved George W. Bush, the second worst president in modern times. He may honestly think that black and brown lives matter, but, as mayor of New York City, he showed, time and again, that, for him gentrification – and its concomitants, mass incarceration of young black and Latino men, and brutal “law and order” policing — matter more.

Were he to become the Democratic nominee, it would be bad for democracy and bad for the Democratic Party; and unless his politics has lately taken a hundred and eighty degree turn, bad for the poor, bad for African Americans, and bad for less well-off persons of color generally.

All that is on him. That his candidacy would also be bad for Jews is mainly on Trump.

Remarkably, and to their shame, alarmingly many African Americans now seem to be jumping off the Biden bandwagon and onto Bloomberg's. The word, from the commentariat, is that they think that they have no choice, if they want the Democrats to nominate someone whom they can count on to send Trump packing.

They are dead wrong, of course; anybody this side of Hillary Clinton, running on the Democratic line, could do that as well. But just to be sure, mainstream media, eager to stop Bernie's rise, and functioning for all intents and purposes as the DNC's propaganda arm, are now falling all over themselves, making excuses for the racism inherent in what Bloomberg has said and done in the past.

The stain left by “stop and frisk” will not go away, no matter how vehemently Bloomberg opportunistically apologizes; and there is so much more than that. And yet, many African Americans, especially ones who are getting long in the tooth, seem willing to give him a pass. But this cannot last as the spotlight turns Bloomberg's way. With his birthday just past, we can take comfort in the fact that, as our greatest president famously put it: “you can't fool all the people all the time.”

In addition to all the reasons to oppose Bloomberg that he has brought upon himself, there is another reason for which he cannot be blamed, but that ought to be factored in nevertheless.

Through no fault of his own, a Bloomberg candidacy would likely exacerbate the rising tide of anti-Semitism that Trump's presidency has conjured back into being. Bloomberg can hardly be blamed for this, but it is yet another reason why it would be well to quash his candidacy.

His billions could do a lot of good if used to purchase anti-Trump ads on television and elsewhere in support of Sanders or Warren or of no one in particular, or if used to fund down-ticket national and state races.

However, if used to promote his own presidential ambitions, they would do no good at all – not least because of all the moderates still in the running, he is the worst, the most pre-Trump Republican-lite, in the bunch.

In this electoral season, with an aroused public demanding change, the very idea of a Bloomberg candidacy would be a total and complete non-starter but for one reason alone: that, for all practical purposes, his campaign has no budget constraint.

The sad fact is that, in the Land of the Free, money, if there is enough of it, can turn a non-starter into a front-runner in the wink of a news cycle. There is no need, however, to despair; at least, not yet. If progressives mobilize against him, he can be stopped

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To hear their media toadies tell it, “moderates” and “progressives” are essentially on the same page; the moderates, however, are wiser – more practical, more “pragmatic,” more aware of the myriad ways that public opinion and financial realities constrain political possibilities. Progressives, on the other hand, are pie-in-the-sky dreamers.

Some commentators, Paul Krugman is an example, conclude from this that it hardly matters whether a progressive or a moderate runs against Trump, because, even with a Democratic House and Senate, those constraints will still be in place – thanks partly to the “realities” moderates invoke, and partly thanks to the continuing predominance, even if the next election goes as well as it possibly could, of Democratic House members and Senators who are confirmed stalwarts of moderation.

It would be less civil but more accurate to say that a lot of the Democrats on Capitol Hill are bought and paid for, and that there are therefore limits to how far their venality will allow them to stray from the mainstream fold.

One might also mention the deleterious effects on public opinion of the current surfeit of drivel about the virtues of “bipartisanship.” Republicans are a lost cause, but that doesn’t stop Democrats, especially the more moderate ones, from pulling their already feeble punches, the better to facilitate “working across the aisle.”

Sometimes, as they go on about this, I cannot help but think of Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s 1568 masterpiece “The Blind Leading the Blind.” Nowadays, it is the Right, the GOP, leading the Right or, as they call it on NPR, MSNBC and CNN, the Center Left.

The one is for Trump, the other for the conditions that made Trump and Trumpism inevitable. The former is the greater evil, of course, but the other side is evil too. The “pragmatism” they promote is a snare and a delusion. They may be all for sweetness and light. But the last thing they want is to set a new course; one that would make the Democratic Party something other than the perennial lesser evil it has been for roughly the past hundred years.

As a recovering academic philosopher, I feel compelled to take umbrage at the way mainstream Democrats praise the moderates’ “pragmatism.”

That currently abused and degraded word denotes a school of thought that was one of the glories of nineteenth and twentieth century American philosophy. From the likes of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, George Herbert Meade, John Dewey, and later Willard Van Orman Quine and many other distinguished thinkers to – Hillary Clinton. Or to the moderates running for the Democratic nomination; Biden is the worst of the lot, but they are all bad news. When they and others like them are called “pragmatists,” I feel that the earth should shake with convulsions.

But let that pass. In a political universe in which House and Senate Republicans, and Trump himself and his base and servile cronies, are called “conservatives,” this is only par for the course.

Many, maybe most, potential voters who revile Trump, and who desperately want to see him defeated in November, sincerely believe that moderation is the way to go. I think they are dead wrong; that they ignore pertinent evidence, including evidence arising out

of the 2016 election, and that they fail to grasp the importance, in the election ahead, of voter turnout and therefore of voter enthusiasm.

Subjectively, as Marxists and others used to say, the motives of those who defend moderation for electability's sake can be and often are laudable. Objectively, though, they are on the wrong side of the most consequential political – indeed, class — struggle immediately ahead.

Unlike their intra-party rivals, moderates defend the interests not of the several constituencies that Democrats mainly depend upon for votes, but of the Democratic and broader anti-Trump wing of the ruling class.

With the Sanders campaign flourishing and growing bigger day by day, Democratic Party donors and political elites, along with the media that serve them, are becoming desperate. The fact that they are still unable to settle on who their Great Moderate Hope will be adds to their distress.

Witness how after just a few bad days – a botched Iowa caucus, Trump's inevitable Senate acquittal, and poll results that suggest that the more transparently odious Trump is, the more popular he becomes — it is front page news in The New York Times and Washington Post that Trump is on a roll, and that there will be no stopping him unless and until a moderate savior emerges from the fray.

It is not clear why the other billionaire in the race, Tom Steyer, isn't, by now, the Chosen One. Inasmuch as our “democratic” elections are basically sales campaigns, and inasmuch as good sales campaigns take money, lots of it, to run, one would expect people to be talking about him in the same way that so many now are talking about Bloomberg. And yet his campaign has yet to gain any significant traction at all.

Could it be because his express views are too liberal to relieve the anxiety of the Democratic Party establishment and its “donor class?”

Bloomberg could buy and sell a garden variety billionaire like Steyer ten times over. Could that be why, if the pieces fall into place in just the right way, he could end up his party's nominee while, come what may, Steyer doesn't seem to have a chance?

This seems unlikely, but in the Trump era, so does nearly everything else.

A more pressing question is how did it come to this – how is a Bloomberg versus Trump election, a contest in which a mega-billionaire and whatever Trump is, vie for control

over the Imperium, be anything more than a theoretical possibility in a functioning democracy, much less a self-proclaimed “City on a Hill?”

Even if Vladimir Putin’s attacks on our purportedly democratic institutions are as far-reaching as Cold War revivalists contend – or, rather, since there is no evidence of anything of significance actually having happened in 2016 or subsequently, worse than anything they insinuate – he could hardly do worse than our own plutocrats have already done and are continuing to do.

A Bloomberg candidacy would, in effect, proclaim to the world that democracy in America is finished; that, “we, the people” have lost out entirely to the Almighty Dollar.

We are not there yet, however. If all goes well, we never will be. To that end, the time to squelch Bloomberg’s efforts to buy his way in was yesterday; but today will have to do.

Bloomberg has more money than God, but he comes with a lot more baggage than Klobuchar or Buttigieg or any of the others. It isn’t just “stop and frisk”; thanks to some reporting by the Intercept, it even seems that he could even be called to account for what undid Plagiarism Joe’s run for the White House in 1988. What a lovely irony that would be!

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Trump starts nothing, but he does make everything worse; sometimes much worse.

Also, “the darker angels of our nature” are always there. Prosperity, decent governance, and sound liberal institutions are generally enough to keep them at bay or, better yet, to cause them to lie dormant for long periods of time. But vigilance is necessary, even when times are good, because shocks to the system can and sometimes will draw them out.

The Great Recession was experienced as a severe shock by many, the most vulnerable among us taking the severest hits. Its cause, ultimately, was what Marx called “the laws of motion of capitalist society.” Three decades of neoliberal economic policies were a more immediate and more easily avoidable cause.

The Clintons, both of them, have much to answer for in that regard. Their support for liberal imperialist foreign policy initiatives helped roust the darker angels as well.

For her overall cluelessness and ineptitude, her role in the Obama administration’s continuing implementation of the Bush-Cheney Afghanistan and Iraq Wars, her regime

change machinations in Libya, and her botched reactions to the Arab Spring in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere, Hillary is especially culpable.

Western support for politicized religious fanaticism in the Muslim world didn't start with the Clintons. Blame Zbigniew Brzezinski for that, and Jimmy Carter for not reining him in. But the Clintons were not beyond adding their own two cents.

These were all factors of great importance for getting the refugee crisis in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa going. Hillary was less responsible for the refugee crisis along our southern border, but her support for the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras, one of her first nefarious machinations as Secretary of State, didn't help.

Refugee crises generate humanitarian crises – typically, of monumental proportions. They are also politically destabilizing. These latest examples have made xenophobic nationalism and rightwing populism a blot across the political landscape of the entire planet.

For this, of the two major candidates contending for the presidency in 2016, Clinton was by far the more culpable. It was she, not Trump himself, who made the onset of Trumpism in America and of similar phenomena in Europe and elsewhere all but inevitable.

This is why it would be ridiculously foolish for Democrats to nominate a Clintonite – a neoliberal, liberal imperialist, “moderate” – again.

Thanks to Trump's increasingly manifest odiousness, even a moderate should be able to send him packing in November. But then insofar as she or he will go on to recreate the conditions that caused Trumpism to afflict us in the first place, we will only have bought time. The point is not just to defeat Trump, important as that surely is; it is also to vanquish Trumpism as definitively as can be, by setting the country on a different and better path.

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Of all the demons that crawled out from under the rocks Trump overturned, anti-Semitism had been perhaps the most profoundly dormant. It remained a problem in central and eastern Europe, but in the United States and other Western countries, it had long been little more than a historical memory.

Then came Trump. He may not be good for much, but his foul embrace awakens the dead.

Under his aegis, suddenly, “Jews will not replace us” became a slogan some of “the good people on both sides” would rally around, hate crimes directed at Jews multiplied, and, in Pittsburgh, eleven people were killed and six more wounded at a synagogue in Squirrel Hill. In the United States, nothing anywhere near that lethal had ever happened to Jews before.

Latinos, regardless of citizenship status, were at risk in Trump’s America, except perhaps for those with lots of money. So too were Muslims and black and brown people generally. Jews, however, seemed as safe as the he whitest of the white.

Ironically, there was, or seemed to be, protection in the transparently spurious notion that Zionists have spent decades promoting — that opposition to the Zionist project and even to some of the egregious injustices Israel imposes on Palestinians, and to all but the most trivial misdeeds of Israeli governments, is anti-Semitic. Ironically, “Anti-Semitism,” still has a bad press in Western countries, even in anti-Semitic circles.

By “the Zionist project,” I mean the effort to establish a Jewish state – Benjamin Netanyahu calls it “the nation state of the Jewish people” — in all or most of mandate Palestine. A Jewish state could be secular or religious, but only Jews can enjoy full citizenship rights in it. For historical and political reasons, the situation is complicated and not always clear, but, in the end, “Jew,” in this context, has more of an ethnic than a theological connotation.

It is generally and rightly agreed that nations and ethnic groups are what Benedict Anderson called “imagined communities.” Because the Jews Zionists had in mind did not share a common land or language or culture, and because claims of common descent are, at best, tendentiously exaggerated – because the main or perhaps the only factor that joins the Jews of the world together is an historical connection to the Jewish religion — Jewish nationality or ethnicity is a good deal more imagined than most.

For a variety of historical and theological reasons, practitioners of the Jewish religion have occupied subaltern positions in both the Christian and Muslim worlds for as long as Christianity and Islam have been present on the world stage. For most of that period, roughly from the fifth and sixth centuries up to the time when the first secular, liberal



societies arose in Western Europe and North America, Jews generally fared far better in the Muslim world than in Christendom.

Nevertheless, it was in modern secular Europe that anti-Semitism, hatred of “ethnic” Jews as such, as opposed to theologically driven anti-Judaism, emerged.

For more than half a century after the historic defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, it seemed that true anti-Semitism — as distinct from anti-Zionism, which, for obvious reasons, continued to appeal to subaltern Muslim populations around the world — had burned itself out. This was nowhere more true than in the United States.

Even Trump, it seemed, would not and probably could not undo that. That notion was more than just an idle hope; there were good reasons to think that Jews would remain immune from the afflictions Trump visited upon Muslims, Hispanics, and others.

For one, the hard-Right loves Israel precisely for its ethnocentrism, and because, for many years but especially after 9/11, Islamophobia had come to fill the role that anti-Semitism once played in their thinking.

Inasmuch as the neo-fascists of the twenty-first century are as inclined as mainstream Democrats – and their counterparts in the UK, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand — to buy into the pernicious and obviously false idea that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism, the hard Right’s Zionism functioned as a shield against the true anti-Semitism that had, for so long, been emblematic of rightwing politics in Europe and the Americas.

Christian Evangelicals comprise a very large segment of the Trump base, and they love Israel too; they think that its existence fulfills Biblical prophecies and that its role in the End Times is indispensable. Israel, in their view, is where world Jewry will be ingathered before the Second Coming, when Jews will either accept Christ or be consigned to suffer the torments of Hell for all eternity.

It would be hard to deny that there is more than a whiff of real anti-Semitism in their madness. It is also hard to deny that it puts evangelicals and Hard Right anti-anti-Semites in the same camp.

And then, of course, there are the Jewish Zionist plutocrats, the Trump and Kushner families’ friends and soulmates, whose money Trump loves most of all.

None of these shields have been quite enough to rein in the demons Trump let loose. And so, real anti-Semitism has once again become a factor in American life.

As the likelihood of a Sanders victory in the contest to become the Democratic Party's nominee, and the far greater likelihood, if he is the nominee, that he will send Trump packing, becomes increasingly clear to the Democratic Party's grandees, donors, and media hacks, the anti-Sanders onslaught that is already underway will likely grow to monstrous proportions. The knives are even now being drawn.

Expect too to see a homegrown version of the anti-Corbyn smear campaign that defiled the last UK election, even though Sanders' liberal Zionist views on Israel-Palestine are hardly as far-reaching or principled as Corbyn's anti-imperialist take on this and all other comparably vexed situations.

It will be spearheaded by the mainstream Democratic Party and their media flunkies, even though Sanders' views on Israel-Palestine and Corbyn's hardly compare. Sanders is a liberal Zionist with a strong sense of justice, not an anti-imperialist. But this is about as good as it gets in American politics at the national level, and it is more than enough to rattle the cages of AIPAC and other core institutions of the Israel lobby. Aided and abetted by rightwing ("centrist") Democrats, expect them to go after Bernie with all they've got.

Thus, he will be the target of a Pincer movement, besieged from both sides – by anti-Semites and pro-Zionists alike.

Zionist stalwarts will attack him for speaking out for justice for Palestinians, not just for Israeli Jews, calling Sanders a self-hating Jew, and his non-Jewish supporters "anti-Semites," even as real anti-Semites, will crawl out into the open, spreading vileness wherever they go.

That vileness will multiply many times over, as the yahoos in the Trump base come to realize that the alternative to Sanders is another Jew, one who is richer than Croesus and who really does want to take their guns away.

Mayor Pete may be a feckless twit, but at least he doesn't set those demons off.

And to think – the line on Bloomberg is that, if Joe can't do it, as he plainly cannot, and if Pete and Amy falter, as they likely will, then the world needs Mike to restore equanimity to the political scene. Really? Through no fault of his own, but inexorably even so,

equanimity is the last thing Bloomberg would restore in a political universe defiled by Trump and his cronies and set adrift.

A month or so from now, the choice will be even clearer than it already is: Democrats can move forward with Sanders or, if the moderates can't do better than Bloomberg, backwards to a place where no one in their right mind would want to be.

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