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Crony Capitalism, Empire and America's Military Industrial Complex

By Dr. Gary G. Kohls

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In his 1960 farewell address, the moderate Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower tried to warn us naïve and trusting Americans about the nefarious agendas of the amoral, pro-corporate, pro-war, imperialistic military/industrial (i.e., corporate)/national security/congressional complex (especially the weapons industries, the Pentagon, the CIA, and the FBI) that Ike had seen acquiring excessive power during his administration.

Americans after WWII were feeling increasingly prosperous and optimistic about the future because the nation's infrastructure, industries, productivity, markets and non-military citizens had not been victimized or blasted to smithereens like their economic competitors in Europe and Asia. Ike's prescient warnings were essentially ignored or censored out of the public's consciousness by nefarious anti-democratic entities that were operating behind the scenes.

Eisenhower had experienced the horrors of wars up close, and he despised them, and he was therefore no Hawk, unlike so many of the pro-war Republican bigwig Chicken Hawks that followed him in positions of power in that political party. He had managed to keep the US out of war during his 8 years in office, and he never could see the justification for the US military's use of nuclear weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ike knew that Japan had already lost the war well before the atom bombs were dropped on those unarmed, innocent civilian populations.

Eisenhower was also one of the last Republican presidents that understood the dangers of unregulated corporate power when it was combined with unrestrained governmental/military power. He probably knew better than most how the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini defined fascism (*“Fascism should...be called corporatism as it is a merger of state and corporate power”*)

Sometime after Ike’s speech, between the political assassinations of the liberal political leaders JFK, MLK and RFK (during the 1960s) and the end of the 20th century, progressives have felt increasingly distrustful of the emerging far-right, pro-corporate, pro-militarist, pro-wealth, anti-intellectual, Christian fundamentalist-influenced agendas of the Republican Party. And justifiably so.

Many progressives have frequently felt betrayed by the right-ward shift of the national Democratic Party which has been increasingly influenced by pro-corporate, pro-militarist, pro-wealth agendas. The national Democratic Party, despite its often honorable past fighting for the rights of the little guy (with their party platforms frequently supporting children’s rights, worker’s rights, women’s rights, voting rights, civil rights, etc) seems to have abdicated those honorable stances to the American Green Party. (See the list of Green Party values at: <http://www.gp.org/tenkey.php>.)

I mourn the rapidly disappearing years when progressive Minnesotans could feel good about being able to vote for courageous, ethical, liberal democratic candidates like Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, Eugene McCarthy and Paul Wellstone. Democratic President Back in the 1940s, Harry Truman warned Democrats about promoting agendas that appealed to the wealthy, the corporations and the militarists when he said *“If a voter has a choice between a Republican and a Democrat who acts like a Republican, he’ll vote for the Republican every time.”*

But Republicans like Richard Nixon, Spiro Agnew, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, the Bushes, Newt Gingrich, ad nauseum, kept getting elected; and we citizens – just like the naïvely trusting place-kicker Charlie Brown when the devious Lucy jerked the football away – always seem to realize too late that we have been bamboozled again. Of course the group of politicians above usually wound up discrediting themselves over their warmongering in Vietnam or Lebanon or Granada or Nicaragua or El Salvador or Columbia or because of their greedy inclinations to maintain their power, prestige, prerogative and the need to serve their anonymous paymasters.

The consequences of living in a corporatized, militarized, national security-obsessed nation has always made me especially wary of the GOP, and the more neo-fascist that that party leans and the more it is influenced by excessively wealthy special interest groups that profit from war and globalization, the more I distrust and fear it.

The 12 years of unrestrained crony capitalism during the anti-democracy mis-leadership of Republican presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush tricked most of us into naively believing in their fraudulent “Trickle-down Economics”. Simultaneously those administrations tried to freak us out into going along with their agendas by endlessly exaggerating the military (and economic) threats from the Soviet Union. Reagan called the USSR the “Evil Empire” and

they called Ronald Wilson Reagan (old “666” himself) the “The Great Satan”. Both monikers seemed justified to many.

The wealthy investor classes and financial markets loved the Reagan-era’s tax cuts for the wealthy, the unrestrained borrowing, spending and permanently indebting of America (to the tune of 4 trillion dollars [in 1980 dollars] just during the Reagan years) , and the US Treasury has ever since, been paying out hundreds of billions of dollars of interest annually to the wealthy investors on Wall Street).

One of the doctrines of American conservatism is a strong and well-funded military/national security apparatus (in order to protect private and corporate investments abroad). The mass purchases (using borrowed money, not tax money) of unaffordable, often useless (and sometimes unwanted, even by the Pentagon) weapons systems were justified by appealing to America’s orchestrated mass paranoia about the arms races with the USSR, including, of course, huge amounts of borrowed money for “modernizing” and enlarging America’s destabilizing nuclear arsenals.

Seeing Through the Myths of the GOP’s “Compassionate Conservatism” and its “Big Tent”

A campaign image that cunning GOP strategists in the past have tried to convey is the notion that Republicans are “Compassionate Conservatives” with a “Big Tent” that welcomes everybody, when most of the national and state party platforms, especially those in Bible Belt states, espouse exclusivist agendas that are anything but welcoming or compassionate towards racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities, gays and lesbians, women (especially pregnant women and those with children), disadvantaged children, immigrants, war refugees, anti-war activists, peacemakers, the environment and the sick, poor, hungry, under-employed and homeless.

Cunning Republican strategists and their politicians were perpetrating the lie that their party, which attracts virulent nationalists, pro-war militarists, war profiteers of every ilk, anti-environmentalists, sociopathic billionaires, compassionless corporations, union breakers, racists, climate change deniers, holocaust deniers, anti-intellectuals, sexists, liberal-haters like the KKK and Aryan Nation, homophobes, xenophobes, sexists, people who believe in the Rapture (!), people who believe that the earth is less than 10,000 years old (and therefore insist on teaching pseudoscientific creationism to their children as real science) and other right-wing groups.

That is a partial list of who is already in the fictional “Big Tent”. People of conscience will not feel welcome there because true liberals with open-minds have already been fingered as mortal enemies.

Most progressive thinkers wouldn’t want to be rubbing elbows with some of the folks in the Big Tent, especially the ones who refuse to listen to reason, who refuse to give any credence to the scientific method or who disbelieve established and documented facts.

The GOP Big Tent Myth is a Big Lie propaganda trick that is designed to get the brain-washed and the dis-informed to believe something that isn't true so that they can be convinced to vote against their own best interests.

Near the end of this essay are two important lists of reasons to be wary when voting in an election that is dominated by the two major parties in America that have hundreds of millions of dollars to spend on mostly inane, repetitive, often negative TV advertising. Further below are a number of quotes from well-known conservative Republicans. They should give every thinking voter pause.

The term "thinking voter" reminds me of a story about the brilliant Democratic Party politician Adlai Stevenson, who was the endorsed Democratic Party candidate for president who twice ran unsuccessfully against the war hero Eisenhower. He was known for giving powerful, highly reasoned and humorous campaign speeches. During one such speech, a woman in the crowd called out "Senator, you have the vote of every thinking person!" Stevenson simply smiled and replied, "That's not enough, madam, we need a majority!"

I am afraid that we are in an era where the majority of Americans are 1) too distracted (with sports, entertainment, drug or celebrity addictions) to vote intelligently, are 2) too poor, oppressed, malnourished, disinterested or disillusioned with both parties even to want to vote or 3) are too under-informed or ignorant of the issues to figure out which party or candidate best represents their children's interests.

If such eligible voters actually do tear themselves away from the mass entertainment media or their "I don't give a damn" drugs long enough to actually vote, many of them will vote for the candidate with the most expensive or most meaningless or negative campaign ads on TV and not for the party or candidate that espouses agendas that would be best for their children, themselves, the survival of the planet or the nation. It's obvious that most voters don't fully appreciate that the best candidates might be the ones that don't have enough money to even pay for one TV ad or even purchase lawn signs (which, unfortunately, is true for many worthy Green Party candidates).

America still has a thinking problem. And that is why propaganda and million dollars per minute commercials, that only the rich can afford to purchase, continue to effectively sell plastic crap a person doesn't really need, including hidden political agendas.

Before concluding, I want to add that, in my opinion, Stuart Mills, the One Trick Pony and GOP-endorsed candidate for Minnesota's District 8 US House of Representatives has none of the qualities necessary to be a credible, independently thinking member of the US Congress. Mills would undoubtedly be a simple drone in Congress, a me-too voter for the low corporate tax agenda and anti-Obama Congressional gridlock of Speaker of the House John Boehner.

Mills would undoubtedly be totally beholden to his many out-of-state financial supporters that include the Koch Brothers cabal, the mining corporations, the supporters of the democracy-killing Citizen's United ruling (allowing corporate personhood and unlimited, anonymous campaign bribery), the nefarious American Legislative Exchange Council and the National Rifle

Association (which is another One Trick Pony that cares not one iota for any parts of the US Constitution except for the mis-interpreted 2nd Amendment). I say One Trick Pony because Mills, the NRA and the wealthy gun manufacturing corporations that fund the NRA are all irrationally (and laughably) paranoid about the ridiculous Fox News-promulgated myth that Democrats want to take away their hunting rifles and shotguns.

I hasten to add that Mills might be a qualified candidate (and far less harmful to our democracy) if he were running for the assistant executive directorship of Northern Minnesota's NRA; but please, not for Congress!

Green Party candidate Skip Sandman and DFL candidate Rick Nolan both beat Mills all hollow on every issue that is important to common folks, but Sandman is better than both on anti-corporate issues, anti-war issues, on the sustainability of the planet and on the cautious approach that is essential before potentially "game over" sulfide mining near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Northern Minnesota is allowed to proceed. The out-of-state mining company PolyMet has an unproven (for safety) plan to mine copper, nickel, zinc and rare earth metals in environmentally-sensitive northern Minnesota, a plan which opens up the distinct possibility of disastrous, irreversible, irremediable and century's long deadly poisoning of the habitat, the drinking water, the ground water, rivers, lakes and wild rice beds in northern Minnesota, much of which is on native American land and thus in violation of native treaty rights.

What I say about Stuart Mills can be said for Becky Hall, the GOP-endorsed candidate for state house of representatives in House District 7A. Hall is another one of those cute, smiley-faced, blond Republican females (and well-groomed for remembering talking points) that have emerged in abundance in the Republican Party over the years. She is a Tea Party favorite (like Sarah Palin), a pro-NRA candidate and a naïve believer in everything that the sociopathic mining corporation PolyMet has told her.

One of Hall's endorsements has come from a minor entity of the pro-Big Business, pro-PolyMet, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Like Stuart Mills, Hall would be a lapdog legislator, (hopefully, but unlikely to be, somewhat uncomfortable with the various co-opted folks that are beholden to the party bosses who call the shots). If elected, Hall would likely be absorbed into the GOP caucus and be expected to vote for every anti-democracy, pro-corporate agenda item at the capitol. Green Party candidates for House District 7A (Duluth, MN) Kriss Osbakken and Jennifer Schultz both beat Hall on every issue that is important to common folks.