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What Happens When the Trump Bubble Bursts?

By David Rosen
December 20, 2016

On January 20, 2017, president-elect Donald Trump will be inaugurated the nation's 45th President. Almost a year to the date, on January 24, 2016, Republican candidate Trump boasted at a Sioux Center, IA, campaign rally, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters." Sadly, he was probably right then — and his prediction will likely be worse after January 20th. But how long will Trump's electoral halo keep him covered in a superhero costume of invincibility?

Following his inauguration, Trump and his ever-increasing entourage of family and business cronies will take over the White House and transform the Kennedy-era Camelot into a scene from Dante's Inferno. Mirroring the gaudy, ostentatious bad taste of his "luxury" hotels, it will come to resemble Dante's eighth level of Hell, Malebolge, an amphitheatre-shaped pit in which panderers, pimps, seducers and others are whipped, ducked in boiling pitch and their feet licked by flames. In Trump's Malebolge, old-style sinners will be replaced by 21st century crooks and con-men be they Goldman Sachs scam artists, ex-military hustlers or political hacks as well as their legions of enforcers, the vast bureaucracy that distributes the spoils.

The Washington Post estimates that Trump made 282 "promises" during the campaign and since the election he has masterfully begun to back-peddle, dropping one after another. A handful of his growing list of misdirections include:

+ The building of a Mexican wall has been downsized — “For certain areas I would [use fences], but certain areas, a wall is more appropriate,” he said. “I’m very good at this, it’s called construction.”

+ The mass round-up of 11 million undocumented immigrants has been revised — “What we are going to do is get the people that are criminals and have criminal records, gang members, drug dealers, where a lot of these people, probably 2 million, it could be even 3 million, we are getting them out of our country or we are going to incarcerate.”

+ Stopping Muslim immigration to the US has been amended — he’s now calling for “extreme vetting” and a shutdown on immigration from countries compromised by terrorism.

+ His pledge to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) has been clarified — he now proposes to keeping coverage for pre-existing conditions and youths under 26 years of age on their parent’s health plans.

Trump is wobbling, taking more accommodating, conventional Republican positions on still other promises made. While calls to “Lock her up!” are still heard at his “victory” rallies, the president-elect has backed off from his campaign call to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email system. While he championed torture techniques on terrorist suspects during the campaign, he is no longer certain that torturing is a good idea. While promising to void the Paris climate agreement, he now claims an “open mind” about the accord. Perhaps most surprising, the unstoppable real-estate hustler has admitted illegal deals by his family foundation and made an out-of-court settlement with those conned by his dubious “Trump U.” One can only guess how many more of his promises will be “clarified” once he takes office.

Trump is riding high, whether greeting well-wishers at his urban estate on Fifth Avenue, on his victory tour throughout the country or at the Army-Navy football game. His Cabinet nominees have been greeted with wonder, the most ill-prepared and ideological backward-looking assembly of has-beens ever to (if confirmed) run the U.S. government. Often forgotten, the federal budget is a \$3.8 trillion slush fund that accounts for more than a fifth (21%) of the nation’s economy or GDP.

Mainstream Republicans are going along with Trump’s incoherent statements (i.e., Tweets), dubious international initiatives (e.g., toward Taiwan) and audacious nominations (e.g., ExxonMobil’s Rex Tillerson) because he’s given them nearly-absolute control over the U.S. budget and policy-making for the next four years (at least). Like pigs at the trough, they know the system is theirs for the taking — and they will squeeze it for all they can get.

The U.S. government is a corrupt business enterprise — not unlike many state and city governments throughout the country — in which the laws have been written so that the guilty can legally rip off the system. For those Republicans on the lucrative revolving door of government-official-turned-lobbyist-turned-corporate-officer, the great shakedown is surely underway. Who knows how many expense-account lunches and after-work cocktails have been shared during which unofficial deals have been cut, commissions calculated and hookers

exchanged? And who but the most apparently corrupt TV-huckster should oversee the enterprise?

Trump drew much of this grassroots support from two vengeful rightwing tendencies, Christian moralists and white nationalists. For those Republicans who wear their religion like a military medal, Trump's victory is leverage for the cultural zombies calling for the return of the repressed. Their first initiative will be to secure the appointment of an arch-conservative Supreme Court judge in the Antonin Scalia mold. After that, pick your target – Obamacare, the environment from fracking to Standing Rock, abortion, birth control and sex education, gay and trans rights, minimum wage and (why not?) school prayer. And who but the least apparently moral politician in recent history should oversee the coming great cultural regression?

Trump is a great showman, a postmodern 21st century figure cast in the mold of the legendary, premodern circus-master, P. T. Barnham. Barnham (1810-1891) is remembered today, if at all, for the Barnham & Bailey Circus, officially the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows started in 1919. Barnham lived a complex life. He founded a weekly newspaper and served as mayor Bridgeport, CT, and two terms in the Connecticut legislature before establishing the “P. T. Barnum’s Grand Traveling Museum, Menagerie, Caravan & Hippodrome.”

But Trump is not Barnham. Where Trump is a regressive comic-book character, Barnham was a true progressive. He was a Republican when it meant being allied with Pres. Lincoln and the Union’s war against slavery. Reflecting on the 13th Amendment concerning slavery and African-American suffrage, Barnum declared, “A human soul, ‘that God has created and Christ died for,’ is not to be trifled with. It may tenant the body of a Chinaman, a Turk, an Arab or a Hottentot – it is still.”

Trump came to power repeating Ronald Reagan’s campaign mantra, “make America great again.” His ceaseless incantation of this failed rhetoric speaks to a narcissistic attempt to reverse history, to contain capitalism’s ceaseless effort at globalization. This process is being imposed on the U.S. and the president-to-be. His proposal of Tillerson for Sec. of State illustrates just how much corporate power has gained control over the federal government. The state – and its taxing authority – is seen by Trump and his associates as a cash machine.

The American rightwing will rule! It is a complex political and social force that includes Christian conservatives, race nationalists, 2nd Amendment gun-salesmen and armed anti-taxers along with oil executives, hedge-fund barons, medical-industry scammers and real-estate hustlers as well as many other “ordinary” – and mostly white — Americans.

Trump and the Republican establishment share one thing in common: to the victor go the spoils. After January 20th, they will run the show and Trump will deliver on his true promise to his core backers: greater wealth to the 1 percent. But greed and opportunism can only go so far. What happens when all the low-hanging political and financial spoils have been picked? What happens when promises are not met and disillusionment deepens?

Stroking a crystal ball, one can image that during Trump’s first year or two as President, his administration will function under a media and political halo, one modeled after his campaign

and popular series, “The Apprentice.” That halo will enable Trump’s backers to get away with everything. The U.S. will finally have a president who embodies what the Situationists’ identified as the “spectacle”: Trump is the living commodity spectacle.

Trump’s cronies will loot the nation’s coffers through dubious contracts and side deals, especially at the Dept. of Defense with a budget about \$600 billion. They will also kill-off beneficial programs for those most in need – and potentially most threatening to corporate and rightwing Christian power – by shrinking the Departments of Labor, Environmental Protection, Housing, Healthcare and Education. Say good-bye to the Supreme Court and with it a women’s right to an abortion and birth control, to more tax cuts for the rich and corporations and less benefits for ordinary Americans, to the end of restrictions on fracking and coal mining, an end to gay and trans rights, to public education, to financial regulation and, very likely, to National Endowments and PBS-NPR. Trump’s presidency will be a nightmare come true.

Trump’s campaign fantasy to make the U.S “great again” is doomed by the self-interest of his corporate and Congressional backers, the 1 percenters and their hacks. But it is also doomed by the historical development of capitalism, from a nation-state enterprise of production to a global system of financial tyranny. During this century-long process, the extraction of surplus value, wealth, was ever-more rationalized. Over the last century, capitalism has taken over the economic space (i.e., marketplace), then moved on the public space (i.e., government) and, finally, to the colonization of private life (i.e., unconscious).

As president, Trump will be the commander-in-chief of distraction. Like innumerable other real-estate and reality-TV hucksters, Trump thrives on hustling, of deal making. Over the next few years, Trump’s often-ecstatic celebration of American “greatness” will likely be echoed by the mainstream media. It did the same during the campaign; Trump holds the media hostage as they chase his nocturnal Tweets. They will do anything for a few minutes with “the Donald.”

But how long will this coverage distract Americans from the truth of their living existence? How long can the distraction industry go on endlessly telling people that things are better than they are experiencing? The social fiction of “making America get again” can only last for so long. Over time and seeing through the miasma of corporate media, people – many of them his former supporters – will question whether Trump can deliver on the promises he made during the campaign primary. What happens if the promises Trump made to his white working- and middle-class backers fail to be fulfilled? As Malcolm X warned, the chickens will come home to roost.

One response to likely deepening disillusionment is evident in the efforts by some of Trump supporters to establish a 21st century version of the post-WW-II HUAC-McCarthy witch-hunts and blacklists. For them, the words “terrorist threat” provides the rationale for an all-powerful security state, restriction of First Amendment freedoms and the repression of unions, advocacy groups and independent activists.

If Trump economic efforts flounder, one could imagine a significant “terrorist” attack(s) occurring during his presidency. Well-researched studies suggest that the next terrorist attached will be executed by either a lone-wolf jihadist or a rightwing, white nationalist; social terror is

intensified deeply troubled men often. Under Trump, federal authorities and mainstream media will likely artfully turn the jihadist into a “terrorist threat,” while dismissing the white Christian nationalist as a “fanatic.”

Fueled by his uncompromising rhetoric, Trump’s security state will likely establish or allege a link between a suspected “terrorist” and an activist or an activist group, most likely someone on a terrorist watch list. It could serve as a great distraction, a “false flag” attack like some consider the Boston marathon bombing. How far will Trump’s law-enforcement apparatus go? Will they criminalize populist movements like Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, anti-fracking and \$15 minimum wage?

Trump, his family and his Cabinet – officially — believe they can deliver on the promises he made during the campaign. A successful TV gameshow host truly believes he can lie his way out of the great political contradiction – of promising and not delivering — by redefine the promises once made.

What happens if Trump fails to delivery on his promises and popular disillusionment spreads among his followers? What happens if, during Trump’s first few years as President, the modest gains of the Obama years falter as Trump’s economic policies fulfilling Republican promises (e.g., tax and social-spending programs) takes over? Will the strutting presidential showman be unmasked as nothing more than a grand conman?

At some point, growing number of ordinary Americans will likely feel more dismal, squeezed by their flat paychecks, yet stretched by the hard reality of paying bills, for housing, healthcare and increased taxes. Wage stagnation has characterized the plight of working Americans since the 1970s; it will likely only get worse as Trump’s tax plans favoring the rich take effect.

Misdirection is the art of American politics, but what happens when the truth of a deepening social crisis peaks its head through the miasma of a showman’s fiction? What happens if – and it’s a big “if” — social disillusionment deepens (especially among Trump supporters) over the next two years. What if a radical insurgency challenges the rigged state-gerrymandered system that determines legislative districts?; what if they upset the Republican hold on Congress? It could be a transformative period.

Such a development might lead more “moderate” Republicans – the old-fashioned country-club establishment — to oppose Trump and his administration of self-serving fools. And, who knows, new “leaks” from a federal security service operative revealed that a high-level Trump insider (e.g., Rudi Giuliani, Corey Lewandowski?) was intimately involved in how the “revelations” garnered from the Russian hack of the Democrat Party was exploited, found its way to W. It could lead to a bi-partisan Clinton-like impeachment effort in which espionage replace sex scandal as the mass-market hook.

Christmas and the New Year are coming so one can wish for better days.