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Is This Any Way to Stop Fascism?



Image by BP Miller.

If Vice President Kamala Harris was hoping the *New York Times*' interview with John Kelly, Trump's former Chief of Staff and retired Marine Corps General, would be the "October surprise" that would shift prospective voters against Trump, it has not played out that way, so far.

Published on October 22, Kelly's interview is a shocking read. Trump, according to Kelly, mused openly that "Hitler did some good things, too," and that he would rule like a dictator. When asked to explain his definition of fascist, Kelly said:

"Certainly the former president is in the far-right area, he's certainly an authoritarian, admires people who are dictators — he has said that. So he certainly falls into the general definition of fascist, for sure."

When asked how he responded to Trump's admiring comments about Hitler, Kelly told Trump:

"First of all, you should never say that. But if you knew what Hitler was all about from the beginning to the end, everything he did was in support of his racist, fascist life, you know, the, you know, philosophy, so that nothing he did, you could argue, was good — it was certainly not done for the right reason."

Kelly's interview along with Mark Milley's, the former Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, quotes from Bob Woodward's new book *War*, who also described Trump "as a fascist to the core," has allowed the Democrats and Harris to openly call Trump a fascist, where in the past they have avoided doing so.

It should be noted that however damning John Kelly's interview was, it was qualified on some points. Kelly told the NYT: "In many cases, I would agree with some of his policies. But again, it's a very dangerous thing to have the wrong person elected to high office." Once again, the Democrats in their campaign focus on Trump's character, not the substance of his policies, which they are also complicit with, especially on immigration.

The Harris-Walz campaign has deployed Kelly's most damning statements in thirty and sixty second ads nationwide. "An unprecedented warning" is how they begin. But, how unprecedented is it, really? Charges of fascism and authoritarianism have been thrown at Trump since he first made his first, notorious announcement that he was running for president in 2015.

One of Trump Republican rivals for the 2016 nomination, former Ohio Governor John Kasich, made a similar video using a retired Air Force colonel and Vietnam POW, Tom Moe, to draw attention to Trump's fascist leanings. Moe paraphrased the late German pastor Martin Niemöller's poem about the Nazi's rise to power:

"You might not care if Donald Trump says Muslims must register with their government because you're not one. And you might not care if Donald Trump says he's going to round up all the Hispanic immigrants, because you're not one ... if he keeps going and he actually becomes president, he might just get around to you. And you better hope there's someone left to help you."

But, to no avail. Trump, despite such pleas, was elected president or more accurately selected by the ancient system of the Electoral College for the presidency, despite his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton winning three million more votes.

This was before the far right riots in Charlottesville, where Trump described the unsavory crew of Nazis and other assorted far right and armed fascists and white supremacists as "fine

people,” before Trump called out the fascist Proud Boys during the 2020 Presidential debate to “stand back and stand by,” and before the January 6th insurrection organized by the Trump White House.

For a country that derived much of its moral authority that followed WWII by defeating the Nazis in the Second World War and the prosecution of war criminals at Nuremberg, this is quite a shift in mainstream politics. What happened? WWII nostalgia faded long ago following decades of less glorious and losing wars that were in many cases opposed by a significant section of the population for various reasons. The old guard rails keeping the far right out of mainstream politics began to fall in the 1990s.

It is also pretty clear from the growth of Christian Nationalism and good old fashioned, American racist and xenophobic politics, combined with a deepening and very visible social crisis for the broad working class and lower middle class, that a significant section of population is looking for someone who doesn't come from the traditional political class, who even seems above normal politics to fix thing.

After all, nothing seems to work anymore, especially the political system. Writing for the U.K. New Statesman, Bruno Maçães reported recently from Michigan:

It may be difficult for Europeans to understand how dysfunctional much of America has become. Nothing works. Bathrooms in bus stations and fast-food joints have often been closed for months. Public facilities are invariably old. Streets are spectacularly dirty. Service workers may go on small, local strikes no one hears about. Supermarket shelves may be empty because of shoplifters. In Erie, Pennsylvania, two days before the Warren campaign event, I took a train in the middle of the night. Outside the station, the homeless begged to enter the waiting room, only to be denied by the station master, who promptly fell asleep on the floor. I was told that many people try to jump on moving freight trains as they have no money for tickets. Once the station master woke up from his drunken slumber, he told me a “bum” had been run over by a moving train while sleeping on the tracks just a few days before. Now he worries because no one is checking the tracks every night.

Of course, things still work very well in America if you have money, or if you have a lot of it.

While it may be overstating it to say there are people looking for a strongman, some tech billionaires, such Peter Theil and Elon Musk, clearly are, along with a majority of the U.S. Supreme Court whose ruling have immeasurably strengthened the presidency. Theil and Musk, who stand to rake in billions of dollars in federal government contracts on top of billions that they already loot from us.

Fear of a Trump restoration has led Amazon owner Jeff Bezos, publisher of the *Washington Post*, and Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, to intervene to stop their respective editorial boards from endorsing Kamala Harris for president. This has led to resignations of editorial board members and staff at both newspapers. Emblazed across the *Washington Post's* mast head is its official slogan, *Democracy dies in the dark*.

Kamala Harris' tired, old playbook is paving the way for a Trump restoration. If there is some public, historical memory of fascism it is that defined by war and genocide. The Biden-Harris regime is neck deep in war and genocide and has no moral authority to wave the anti-fascist flag. Her campaign also is eerily reminiscent of Hilary Clinton's failed 2016 campaign. She has failed to distinguish herself from Biden on any major issue or generate any enthusiasm. It feels like 2016 all over again.

The Democrats may pull it off in the end in a very close race, but the prospect of far right violence and election challenges loom on the horizon.

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