

# Denouncing Socialism, Practicing Fascism

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*With Trump the silences are usually as expressive of his intentions as the incoherent dogmas. Indeed, his Second State of the Union Address (delivered in Congress on February 5, 2019) gives a clear insight into the political mentality of tormentor in chief when it comes to the human condition.*

*The speech contains many tensions, but none more illuminating than his denunciation of socialism and his silence about the resurgence of fascist tendencies throughout the world, and not least in his own country, which he several times anointed that night as the best the world has ever known. He is not the first leader to make such a claim, of course, but he is undoubtedly the least qualified, and his own two years of faulty leadership has contributed to making America far less admired and far more feared, than previously.*

His diatribe against socialism had at least two targets: First, the Sanders wing of the Democratic Party now personified by the more radical recently elected women in the House of Representatives, especially Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, as well as the declared female presidential aspirants, Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, and Tulsi Gabbard. And secondly, the Maduro elected government in Venezuela, which he alleged failed because of its 'socialist policies.' Trump contends that these policies transformed Venezuela from being a wealthy example to the rest of Latin America into a society of 'abject poverty and despair.'

When it comes to the United States, to contend that there is an incipient ideological war between the Democrats as the party of socialism and the Republicans as the party of capitalism, Trump seems to be launching a more virulent version of the Cold War than what existed during the period of rivalry with the Soviet Union. It also overlooks the persistence of the toxic 'bipartisan consensus,' that owes its zombie-like persistence to the Faustian Bargains struck with both political parties that merge support for global militarism with that of capitalism as reinforced by the dysfunctional 'special relationship' to Israel. There is no current intimations that the Democratic Party will field a ticket for the 2020 elections that will challenge this consensus.

The media liberal mainstream, as might be expected, ignores the bipartisan consensus that has by now inscribed anti-socialism in its digital DNA. A typical reaction is that of Chris Cuomo, the unabashedly anti-Trump CNN news program host who warns the Democrats not to fall into the supposed trap set by Trump. Cuomo advises the Democrats that they would be making a potentially fatal mistake if they would be so foolish as to try to defend 'socialism' as a desirable option for American voters.

Of course, the more progressive views articulated by these Democratic presidential hopefuls, as well as by Stacey Adams who the DNC wisely chose for a formal response to

Trump's speech, is not socialism in any meaningful sense. It does not propose shrinking the private sector by shifting the ownership of the mainsprings of production and services to the public sector, that is, to government control. Trump, knowingly or more likely unknowingly, confused 'socialism' with a politics of empathy for the American people. Empathy under current conditions means such humane policies as affordable health care for all, highly subsidized higher education and student debt relief, equitable taxation, environmental and climate change sanity, drastically reduced military spending, and vastly increased infrastructure investment. I would add to this list an end to regime change geopolitics, a reduced global military profile, and an upgrading of respect for international law and international institutions, especially the United Nations.

To denounce socialism as unamerican is something never done even during the ideological hysteria of McCarthyism that disgraced the nation at the height of the Cold War. Trump's language seems intended to brand those who espouse socialism by name or even by their platforms as subversive adherents of a faith alien to American values and traditions:

"... we are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country. America was founded on liberty and independence — not government coercion, domination, and control. We are born free, and we will stay free."

It may be helpful to recall that during the Great Depression the Socialist Party under the leadership of Norman Thomas was a respected and formidable presence on the American political landscape, widely praised by many non-socialist for pushing New Deal Democrats to adopt more compassionate policies toward the poor and unemployed precisely to weaken the appeal of socialist alternatives. For those of us old enough to remember, there are few active in American political life then or now more imbued with American values and our better angels than Norman Thomas. To assert, as Trump did, that socialism is un-American is to insult the memory of this great American.

Perhaps, most serious of all, was the seemingly deliberate misidentification of the ideological threat actively undermining authentic American political, economic, social, and cultural traditions, institutions, reputation, and morale. It is the fascist threat that is real, and the socialist alternative that is fictitious. The celebration of militarism, bonding with autocratic oppressors around the world, the demonizing of immigrants and asylum seekers, war mongering toward Iran, challenging the rule of law, and ultra-nationalist versions of patriotism that are threatening the future of America, not fascism. The perversion of values and the neglect of the real interest of the American people were notably symbolized by several striking silences in Trump's long speech: he not time to include a sentence about climate change, gun violence, or predatory warfare in Yemen.

If we are to restore humane republicanism in America it will require not only a repudiation of Trump and Trumpism but also a rejection of the bipartisan consensus and deep state geopolitics. This means we must hope that the next American president will be a truly progressive female candidate who breaks free of the consensus and is not embarrassed by an ardent embrace of social and political justice for *all* Americans and a global outlook that is responsive to urgent long-term challenges (climate change, nuclear disarmament topping the list) and to the immediate crises calling for international cooperation of an unprecedented scale, a move in the direction of *moral globalization* (migration, famine, crimes against humanity).

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