

Pathological Terror? Engineered Protests and “Health Fears” Ahead of Trump’s Inauguration

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Ain't going to let no ego maniac turn me around, turn me around, keep on walking, keep on talking going to build ourselves a brand-new world. Joan Baez, San Francisco, Jan 15, 2016

The City Hall gleamed in the crisp air of an unusually wintry day in San Francisco, where gatherings ahead of the inauguration of the US president are going to take place. Few from this part of the US intend visiting Washington to grace its presence and acknowledge the President elect, Donald J. Trump. Those in California are hunkering down for the equivalent of bureaucratic street fights, threatening to keep administrations at the local, state and federal level busy for years.

The atmosphere was captured in by the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Jan 15), its cover featuring the state's enraged bear readying for action. “California,” it went with threatening promise, “prepares to roar on many fronts in effort to preserve billions in federal dollars.” Never mind that lions tend to roar.

The *Chronicle*, in a note on the combative spirit seething in California, also informs readers that the Californian legislature has found a legal brief in battling the incoming Trump administration: a Washington, D.C. law firm run by former US Attorney-General Eric Holder.

These protests supposedly touch the tip of a gargantuan iceberg – or so is promised by some media outlets. There is the now promised Women’s March on Washington. Punters suggest a quarter of a million to turn up in female-inspired outrage against the Misogynist-in-Chief. The Untied We Dream group has already been busy with its We Are Here to Stay campaign focusing on immigrant and refugee rights. On January 15, the focus of those gathered before the SF City Hall and some forty other cities was on the American Affordable Health Care Act. Senator Bernie Sanders had been stringing together some inspiration for its defence, and a few Democrats put aside their beef with him to gather in some discordantly looking act of solidarity.

Illness, fear, bodily pathologies feed into the language of the protest; placards waved with a stunned air of foreboding anticipating the assault on the Obama administration’s healthcare efforts: “Repeal Trump”; “Fix it, don’t nix it”. To tamper with health care is to inflict death on the US citizen. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi turned out to the protest in SF, insisting that she, alongside SF Mayor Ed Lee, Supervisors Malia Cohen and Norman Yee and Senator Scott Wiener, were there to not only defend the Affordable Care Act but to remember Martin Luther King’s pointed reference that poor health remains one of the more shocking forms of injustice. But this was the old, defeated guard, and the sense of witnessing political cadavers come to life was hard to dispel.

Mayor Lee revealed those concerns that show the complex business notion that has never been extracted from the US medical health system. In a world of social goods, the idea of health being a profit making measure filled with insurance providers would be obscene. The sense from Lee, then, was that repealing Obama Care would “start us down the path on the road to chaos in the insurance market and declines in coverage.” Not exactly the spirit of MLK Jr, but the market’s representatives tend to talk, even in these debates.

Most appropriately and insightfully, one protester walked around as a reminder that Trump did have one potential use to the withering fabric of the Republic: “Restoring to the US the right to civic protest.” Others were quintessentially odd, idiosyncratically delightful. The compound Shaman, a picture of straggly, knotted hair, a hat tall and jauntily placed, and a disproportionately large placard, was the poster boy.

Sad reminders were also present, a form of failed revolutionary sighs. Sanders supporters, kitted out with the material featuring their preferred presidential candidate whom Hillary Clinton railroaded, were noisily entertaining in their desperation. Their presence lent an air of the inauthentic to proceedings. The times ahead were serious, but the crushed Sanders camp were still giving a sense that something could be done.

The entire fury and desperation can provide the nutrients for a civic revolution in the United States, though much of the anti-Trump protest movement sporadically moves into the dark, visceral matter he is accused of generating. Hot-headed extremism, not debate, flickers before a single administrative act has taken place. A few protesters did not shy away from hoping that Trump would literally be “erased” prior to the Inauguration, obliterated before raising his pen to sign a single decree. Trump remains the necessary demon, part of the bogeyman motif so indispensable to the functioning of US politics.

To work, a genuine reformist drive can hardly be one that will leave the traditional Democrat-Republican axis intact. The point is to make constructive use of the fury, the indignation, and, importantly, the supposed deplorables. They, it must be said, will not be going quietly, while those protesters gathered outside City Hall speak to the status quo. With the anger still tingling in the air, the protesters took their banners and anti-Trump paraphernalia and headed through the farmer’s market. The juxtaposition is worth noting: organic food stalls with fruit and vegetable produce mix in with health concerns and the future of the United States. The stall keepers were making a killing.

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