

Scum vs. Scum

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There is perhaps no better illustration of the deep decay of the American political system than the Senate race in New Jersey. Sen. Bob Menendez (image below), running for re-election, was censured by the Senate Ethics Committee for accepting bribes from the Florida businessman Salomon Melgen, who was convicted in 2017 of defrauding Medicare of \$73 million. The senator had flown to the Dominican Republic with Melgen on the physician's private jet and stayed in his private villa, where the men cavorted with young Dominican women who allegedly were prostitutes. Menendez performed numerous political favors for Melgen, including helping some of the Dominican women acquire visas to the United States. Menendez was indicted in a federal corruption trial but escaped sentencing because of a hung jury.



Menendez has a voting record as sordid as most Democrats'. He supported the \$716 billion military spending bill, along with 85 percent of his fellow Senate Democrats. [He signed a letter](#), along with other Democratic leaders, calling for steps to extradite [Julian Assange](#) to stand trial in the United States. The senator, the ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, is owned by the lobby for Israel—a country that routinely and massively interferes in our elections—and supported moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. He helped cause the 2008 global financial crisis by voting to revoke [Glass-Steagall](#), the Depression-era law enacted to create a firewall between commercial and investment banks.

His Republican rival in the Senate race that will be decided Tuesday is [Bob Hugin](#), whose reported net worth is at least \$84 million. With Hugin as its CEO, the pharmaceutical firm Celgene made \$200 million by conspiring to keep generic cancer drugs off the market, according to its critics. Celgene, a model of everything that is wrong with our for-profit health care system, paid \$280 million to settle a lawsuit filed by a whistleblower who accused the firm of improperly marketing two drugs to treat several forms of cancer without getting Federal Drug Administration approval, thereby defrauding Medicare. Celgene, over seven years, also doubled the price of [the cancer drug Revlimid](#) to some \$20,000 for a supply of 28 pills.

The Senate campaign in New Jersey has seen no discussion of substantive issues. It is

dominated by both candidates' nonstop personal attacks and negative ads, part of the typical burlesque of American politics.

Scum versus scum. That sums up this election season. Is it any wonder that 100 million Americans don't bother to vote? When all you are offered is Bob One or Bob Two, why bother? [One-fourth of Democratic challengers](#) in competitive House districts in this week's elections have backgrounds in the CIA, the military, the National Security Council or the State Department. Nearly all candidates on the ballots in House races are corporate-sponsored, with a few lonely exceptions such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, members of the Democratic Socialists of America who are running as Democrats. The securities and finance industry has backed Democratic congressional candidates 63 percent to 37 percent over Republicans, according to data collected by the [Center for Responsive Politics](#). Democratic candidates and political action committees have received \$56.8 million, compared with Republicans' \$33.4 million, the center reported. The broader sector of finance, insurance and real estate, it found, has given \$174 million to Democratic candidates, against \$157 million to Republicans. And [Michael Bloomberg](#), weighing his own presidential run, has pledged \$100 million to elect a Democratic Congress.

"In interviews with two dozen Wall Street executives, fund-raisers, donors and those who raise money from them, Democrats described an extraordinary level of investment and excitement from the finance sector ... ," The New York Times reported about current campaign contributions to the Democrats from the corporate oligarchs.

Our system of legalized bribery is an equal-opportunity employer.

Of course, we are all supposed to vote Democratic to halt the tide of Trump fascism. But should the Democrats take control of the House of Representatives, hate speech and violence as a tool for intimidation and control will increase, with much of it directed, as we saw with the pipe bombs intended to decapitate the Democratic Party leadership, toward prominent Democratic politicians and critics of Donald Trump. Should the white man's party of the president retain control of the House and the Senate, violence will still be the favored instrument of political control as the last of democratic protections are stripped from us. Either way we are in for it.

Trump is a clownish and embarrassing tool of the kleptocrats. His faux populism is a sham. Only the rich like his tax cuts, his refusal to raise the minimum wage and his effort to destroy Obamacare. All he has left is hate. And he will use it. Which is not to say that, if only to throw up some obstacle to Trump, you shouldn't vote for the Democratic scum, tools of the war industry and the pharmaceutical and insurance industry, Wall Street and the fossil fuel industry, as opposed to the Republican scum. But Democratic control of the House will do very little to halt our descent into corporate tyranny, especially with another economic crisis brewing on Wall Street. The rot inside the American political system is deep and terminal.

The Democrats, who refuse to address the social inequality they helped orchestrate and that has given rise to Trump, are the party of racial and ethnic inclusivity, identity politics, Wall Street and the military. Their core battle cry is: *We are not Trump!* This is ultimately a losing formula. It was adopted by Hillary Clinton, who is apparently weighing another run for the

presidency after we thought we had thrust a stake through her political heart. It is the agenda of the well-heeled East Coast and West Coast elites who want to instill corporate fascism with a friendly face.

[Bertram Gross](#) (1912-1997) in “Friendly Fascism: The New Face of American Power” warned us that fascism always has two looks. One is paternal, benevolent, entertaining and kind. The other is embodied in the executioner’s sadistic leer. Janus-like, fascism seeks to present itself to a captive public as a force for good and moral renewal. It promises protection against enemies real and invented. But denounce its ideology, challenge its power, demand freedom from fascism’s iron grip, and you are mercilessly crushed. Gross knew that if the United States’ form of fascism, expressed through corporate tyranny, was able to effectively mask its true intentions behind its “friendly” face we would be stripped of power, shorn of our most cherished rights and impoverished. He has been proved correct.

“Looking at the present, I see a more probable future: a new despotism creeping slowly across America,” Gross wrote. “Faceless oligarchs sit at command posts of a corporate-government complex that has been slowly evolving over many decades. In efforts to enlarge their own powers and privileges, they are willing to have others suffer the intended or unintended consequences of their institutional or personal greed. For Americans, these consequences include chronic inflation, recurring recession, open and hidden unemployment, the poisoning of air, water, soil and bodies, and more important, the subversion of our constitution. More broadly, consequences include widespread intervention in international politics through economic manipulation, covert action, or military invasion.”

No totalitarian state has mastered propaganda better than the corporate state. Our press has replaced journalism with trivia, feel-good stories, jingoism and celebrity gossip. The banal and the absurd, delivered by cheery corporate courtiers, saturate the airwaves. Our emotions are skillfully manipulated around manufactured personalities and manufactured events. We are, at the same time, offered elaborate diversionary spectacles including sporting events, reality television and absurdist political campaigns. Trump is a master of this form of entertainment. Our emotional and intellectual energy is swallowed up by the modern equivalent of the Roman arena. Choreographed political vaudeville, which costs corporations billions of dollars, is called free elections. Cliché-ridden slogans, which assure us that the freedoms we cherish remain sacrosanct, dominate our national discourse as these freedoms are stripped from us by judicial and legislative fiat. It is a vast con game.

You cannot use the word “liberty” when your government, as ours does, watches you 24 hours a day and stores all of your personal information in government computers in perpetuity. You cannot use the word “liberty” when you are the most photographed and monitored population in human history. You cannot use the word “liberty” when it is impossible to vote against the interests of Goldman Sachs or General Dynamics. You cannot use the word “liberty” when the state empowers militarized police to use indiscriminate lethal force against unarmed citizens in the streets of American cities. You cannot use the word “liberty” when 2.3 million citizens, mostly poor people of color, are held in the largest prison system on earth. This is the relationship between a master and a slave. The choice is between whom we want to clamp on our chains—a jailer who mouths politically correct bromides or a racist, Christian fascist. Either way we are shackled.

Gross understood that unchecked corporate power would inevitably lead to

corporate fascism. It is the natural consequence of the ruling ideology of [neoliberalism](#) that consolidates power and wealth into the hands of a tiny group of oligarchs. The political philosopher [Sheldon Wolin](#), refining Gross' thesis, would later characterize this corporate tyranny or friendly fascism as "inverted totalitarianism." It was, as Gross and Wolin pointed out, characterized by anonymity. It purported to pay fealty to electoral politics, the Constitution and the iconography and symbols of American patriotism but internally had seized all of the levers of power to render the citizen impotent. Gross warned that we were being shackled incrementally. Most would not notice until they were in total bondage. He wrote that

"a friendly fascist power structure in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, or today's Japan would be far more sophisticated than the 'caesarism' of fascist Germany, Italy, and Japan. It would need no charismatic dictator nor even a titular head ... it would require no one-party rule, no mass fascist party, no glorification of the State, no dissolution of legislatures, no denial of reason. Rather, it would come slowly as an outgrowth of present trends in the Establishment."

Gross foresaw that technological advances in the hands of corporations would be used to trap the public in what he called "cultural ghettoization" so that "almost every individual would get a personalized sequence of information injections at any time of the day—or night." This is what, of course, television, our electronic devices and the internet have done. He warned that we would be mesmerized by the entertaining shadows on the wall of the Platonic cave as we were enslaved.

Gross knew that the most destructive force against the body politic would be the war profiteers and the militarists. He saw how they would siphon off the resources of the state to wage endless war, a sum that now accounts for half of all discretionary spending. And he grasped that warfare is the natural extension of corporatism. He wrote:

Under the militarism of German, Italian, and Japanese fascism violence was openly glorified. It was applied regionally—by the Germans in Europe and England, the Italians in the Mediterranean, the Japanese in Asia. In battle, it was administered by professional militarists who, despite many conflicts with politicians, were guided by old-fashioned standards of duty, honor, country, and willingness to risk their own lives.

The emerging militarism of friendly fascism is somewhat different. It is global in scope. It involves weapons of doomsday proportions, something that Hitler could dream of but never achieve. It is based on an integration between industry, science, and the military that the old-fashioned fascists could never even barely approximate. It points toward equally close integration among military, paramilitary, and civilian elements. Many of the civilian leaders—such as Zbigniew Brzezinski or Paul Nitze—tend to be much more bloodthirsty than any top brass. In turn, the new-style military professionals tend to become corporate-style entrepreneurs who tend to operate—as Major Richard A. Gabriel and Lieutenant Colonel Paul L. Savage have disclosed—in accordance with the ethics of the marketplace. The old buzzwords of duty, honor, and patriotism are mainly used to justify officer subservience to the interests of transnational corporations and the continuing presentation of threats to some corporate investments as threats to the interest of the American people as a whole. Above all, in sharp contrast with classic fascism's glorification of violence, the friendly fascist orientation is to sanitize, even hide, the greater violence of modern warfare behind such "value-free" terms as "nuclear exchange," "counterforce" and "flexible response," behind the huge

geographical distances between the senders and receivers of destruction through missiles or even on the “automated battlefield,” and the even greater psychological distances between the First World elites and the ordinary people who might be consigned to quick or slow death.

We no longer live in a functioning democracy. Self-styled liberals and progressives, as they do in every election cycle, are urging us to vote for the Democrats, although the Democratic Party in Europe would be classified as a right-wing party, and tell us to begin to build progressive movements the day after the election. Only no one ever builds these movements. The Democratic Party knows there is no price to pay for selling us out and its abject service to corporations. It knows the left and liberals become supplicants in every election cycle. And this is why the Democratic Party drifts further and further to the right and we become more and more irrelevant. If you stand for something, you have to be willing to fight for it. But there is no fight in us.

The elites, Republican and Democrat, belong to the same club. We are not in it. Take a look at the flight roster of the billionaire [Jeffrey Epstein](#), who was accused of prostituting dozens of underage girls and ended up spending 13 months in prison on a single count. He flew political insiders from both parties and the business world to his secluded Caribbean island, known as “Orgy Island,” on his jet, which the press nicknamed “the [Lolita](#) Express.” Some of the names on his flight roster, which usually included unidentified women, were Bill Clinton, who took dozens of trips, [Alan Dershowitz](#), former Treasury Secretary and former Harvard President Larry Summers, the [Candide](#)-like [Steven Pinker](#), whose fairy dust ensures we are getting better and better, and Britain’s Prince Andrew. Epstein was also a friend of Trump, whom he visited at Mar-a-Lago.

We live on the precipice, the eve of the deluge. Past civilizations have crumbled in the same way, although as Hegel understood, the only thing we learn from history is “that people and governments never have learned anything from history.” We will not arrest the decline if the Democrats regain control of the House. At best we will briefly slow it. The corporate engines of pillage, oppression, ecocide and endless war are untouchable. Corporate power will do its dirty work regardless of which face—the friendly fascist face of the Democrats or the demented visage of the Trump Republicans—is pushed out front. If you want real change, change that means something, then mobilize, mobilize, mobilize, not for one of the two political parties but to rise up and destroy the corporate structures that ensure our doom.

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