

Treachery to Some, Opportunism to Others—Horse-trading in the U.S. Congress.

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Jacobin author [Neal Meyer](#) has pointed out what I too was thinking. The Left, indeed all of today's Democrats, would do well to view as a lesson in politics, the successful far-right GOP strategy to bend House-Speaker-in-waiting McCarthy to their will. Liberal commentators watching the horse-trading on the House floor earlier this month, suggested their side could never stoop so low. But, if Democrats might not cheer that process, at least they ought not to regard it as unreasonable or irrational. As Meyer advises, "the Left should take note" and understand that this is politics and is neither illegal nor immoral.

A "carnival of folly," a "theater of the absurd", cries our respected colleague [Chris Hedges](#) commenting on the Freedom Caucus' withholding votes for McCarthy until its demands were met. Why such rancor from him and other liberal commentators? However eloquent Hedges' indignation, that raucous lobbying we witnessed on the Hill is a display of a legitimate process. Vote-trading usually happens less publicly within a party. If conducted between parties, it's generally viewed favorably.

We can't recall seeing former Speaker Nancy Pelosi engaged in an undignified display of that kind? Maybe that's because she was a more skillful party whip. Perhaps also because Democrats are unduly concerned with decorum; they equate good behavior with higher morality.

As Meyer points out in the January 7th Jacobin piece: "If we're going to triumph over the forces of reaction and win these changes and more (reforms important to the left), we're going to need to learn to fight harder and smarter." His unpopular reprimand to the Left is now endorsed by Black Agenda Report senior columnist [Margaret Kimberly](#). "Republicans' deal-making was democracy in action," she rightly points out.

What the liberal press decried was a very public lobbying effort by members of the GOP to press their agenda on a leadership which they knew was desperate for a handful of critical votes. McCarthy hadn't sufficient backing to begin his tenure; he had to form a kind of

coalition with the extremists of his party. To win their votes, he accepted certain far-right terms. Doesn't this happen elsewhere? Especially in nations with a preponderance of small parties, fringe leaders hope to be courted by other party leaders they normally oppose. In Italy and [Israel](#) (whose current coalition is now one of its most extreme) such arrangements are frequent. It happens in Germany and other European countries too.

It's rare in the U.S. because we lack minority parties with sufficiently strong leaders who might wield influence; this in both the Democratic and the Republican Party. In a closely contested American election, it's winner takes all.

It's not as if political vote-trading, or 'horse-trading' as it's known in the U.S., is unfamiliar to Democrats. Speaker Pelosi, regarded as a shrewd politician, was said to engage in this, however decorously, on a regular basis. We should not forget how effectively she rebuffed the left fringe of the party in recent years. The Democratic Congressional Progressive Caucus, now numbering almost 100 members, should be a formidable force in policy formation. Led by Pramila Jayapal, they had seemed determined to hold the line on the vote to fund both 2021 infrastructure bills. The first part of that plan, the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), passed. But its partner bill which was designed to expand Medicare and child tax relief, and fund essential social services as well climate initiatives was put aside. The Progressive Caucus insisted it would support infrastructure funding only if both parts were tied and voted on together. They collapsed and voted for the first while the second bill was sidelined. When that bill was reduced and reworked as Build Back Better, not the Progressives but two rightist Democratic Senators Manchin and Sinema held firm until Democratic Senate whip Schumer accepted their terms.

More recently, the Progressive Caucus of the Democratic Party (some may call it extreme) dared to suggest that the U.S. administration might, just possibly, [open negotiations to end the Ukraine-Russia war](#). They were rebuffed before the letter could be delivered to the president, let alone presented as a bill to Congress. In the end, their noble appeal melted away, barely noticed by the press; we heard no indignation from liberal moralists, and no apologies or proposals for compromise from Pelosi or Biden, both leading supporters of that war. If horse-trading doesn't work there, it's because, regrettably, Progressives have insufficient trading clout. (Although their numbers have grown in recent years.)

Kimberly, in the same Consortium News article, calls out the Progressives for their immaturity.

There was a lot of finger-pointing and snobbery about the Republicans, but there was far too little analysis. Delving into the story in a truthful way would have meant dredging up the progressive Democrats' shameful behavior two years ago and exposing them to the level of critique that Boebert and Gaetz received. Not only did Democratic progressives run for cover when their leadership dropped the hammer, but they lied in order to hide their cowardice."

Referring to forthcoming memorials for Martin Luther King Jr., Kimberly concludes: "The progressives of today possess none of his courage and go along with their party's oligarchy when ordered to do so. The right wingers on the other side of the aisle seem to have far more conviction."

As much as I still have hope for [The Squad](#) (with its numbers gradually increasing) and other

progressives in the U.S. Congress, I concur.

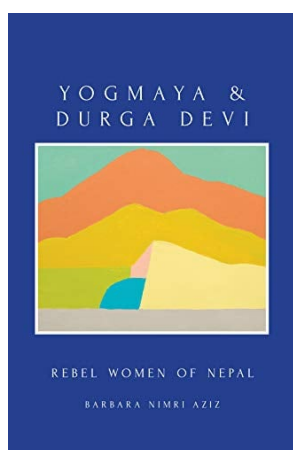
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Barbara Nimri Aziz whose anthropological research has focused on the peoples of the Himalayas is the author of the newly published [“Yogmaya and Durga Devi: Rebel Women of Nepal”](#), available on Amazon.

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[“Yogmaya and Durga Devi: Rebel Women of Nepal”](#)

By Barbara Nimri Aziz

A century ago Yogmaya and Durga Devi, two women champions of justice, emerged from a remote corner of rural Nepal to offer solutions to their nation’s social and political ills. Then they were forgotten.

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This book captures the daring political campaigns of these rebel women; at the same time it asks us to acknowledge their impact on contemporary feminist thinking. Like many revolutionaries who were vilified in their lifetimes, we learn about the true nature of these leaders’ intelligence, sacrifices, and vision during an era of social and economic oppression in this part of Asia.

After Nepal moved from absolute monarchy to a fledgling democracy and history re-evaluated these pioneers, Dr. Aziz explores their legacies in this book.

Psychologically provocative and astonishingly moving, “Yogmaya and Durga Devi” is a seminal contribution to women’s history.

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