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USA

Making Trump's America Ungovernable

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"Trump's America," wrote a leading African-American journalist, Charles Blow, "is not America: not today's or tomorrow's, but yesterday's. Trump's America is brutal, perverse, regressive, insular and afraid. There is no hope in it; there is no light in it. It is a vast expanse of darkness and desolation." (The New York Times, January 30, 2017)

There is a lot of disgust toward Trump and his white nationalist strategist Steve Bannon, former executive chairman of Breitbart News, a leading promoter of conspiracy theories and white supremacists. The Princeton economist and NYT columnist Paul Krugman calls the Trump government the "Trump-Putin regime." However, the attempt to label Trump a puppet of Putin (the Russian president) is an easy way out for liberals, who failed to speak to their own failures or to the decline of unions and working-class political influence.

The fact (a swearword to Trump) is that the Republican Party is now under Trump's control. The official leaders, including House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell, are on board with Trump's America.

Power, especially white power, is behind what they agree will "make America Great Again." African Americans, Mexicans and Muslims especially, Trump says, make America weak. Many white working people accept this dark vision of reality promoted by Trump.

Lessons from South Africa

During the struggle against the apartheid white supremacist regime of South Africa, the African National Party (ANC) coined the phrase: make the country "ungovernable." The ANC and the liberation fighters rejected apartheid rule as illegitimate, since it excluded the clear majority of the population from basic political freedoms and human rights.

That strategy "worked" inside and outside the country "worked." Especially with the rise of Black South African workers' organizing and a powerful mass democratic movement, apartheid's central allies, Washington and President Reagan, could not prevent the Black majority from taking political power.

Is that possible here?

Since Trump's Electoral College "victory," there have been unprecedented protests by a wide cross-section of the population. They include the largest marches ever in Washington, D.C. and other cities, with some three-four million people under the banner "National March for Women's Lives;" protests by Native Americans at Standing Rock Reservation; immigration rights activists defending the undocumented; and the stance by Movement for Black Lives to step up resistance to police violence.

Trump is the bombastic figurehead for the super-rich who rule the country. If the rhetoric and policies begin to hurt their interests because the majority sees Trump's presidency or bizarre behavior as illegitimate, it can become a problem not only for domestic stability but international alliances.

A weathervane historically is the Black population. Resistance by African Americans, as slaves and then as second

class citizens, stimulates others to fight back. The two greatest struggles in U.S. history were the movements for abolition of slavery and to end Jim Crow segregation. The vanguard role of African Americans in those and other struggles has shaped the country.

"My African Americans"

Trump's view of Blacks fits his vision of what makes America great again, which is why all social progress has made the country a "disaster" in his view. He refers to his Black supporters as "My African Americans." He is condescending because he sees Blacks as lesser to himself and other whites.

At the same time, he seeks to use more police terror to put down resistance. It is not a surprise that he targets the Southside of Chicago and talks about sending more (unspecified) federal force to the city.

Trump met with Black supporters on the first day of Black History Month. He praised the fact that an African American National Museum exists and the greatness of Frederick Douglass (d. 1895). Trump referred to Douglass, "someone who has done amazing things and is being recognized more and more, I notice," as though he were still alive.

It's his view of all non-whites. There's not a single Latino in his cabinet "Euros" the first time since Ronald Reagan "Euros" even though they are the largest minority in the country.

A statement by the White House on National Holocaust Day failed to mention that Jews were targeted by Hitler for extermination. His spokesman said it was by design because many others (e.g. Catholics) also were murdered by the Nazis. This reflects the anti-Semitism of the "alt-right" white supremacists.

Racism is about power, as Malcolm X and many radical Black nationalists and militants explained in the 1960s. It doesn't matter if Trump likes African Americans or not. Whites who back Trump's or Steve Bannon's white nativism and nationalism know it is about returning to a pre-civil rights era.

Blacks "Euros" women especially "Euros" will likely be in the vanguard of the new resistance. Black women gave the largest "No" vote to Trump, and initiated the Movement for Black Lives, and were a key leadership component of the January March for Women's Lives.

Why Blacks Step Forward

The historical context is important to grasping why African Americans have always been the main concern of the ruling class, and stepped forward in struggles that benefitted all of society.

The Constitution gave southern slave states extra votes in the Electoral College, increasing their voting power by adding slaves to the total (three-fifths per person). The population of the new country of 13 states was 40% slaves. If the slaves were not counted, the northern states would have dominated the new Congress. Of course, if the slave states did not get those votes, a civil war by the southern states would have likely occurred then.

The Electoral College allowed the United States to exist as a unitary state. Once slavery was abolished its original purpose should have made it obsolete. But the rulers saw the value of limiting the voting power of common citizens for the direct election of president, the most powerful branch of the state.

After the Civil War the issue was: Should the freed slaves get the vote and shift power in the South and the entire country? Radical Republicans supported it; Democrats, including in the North, were against full equality. Lincoln understood this, which is why even during the Civil War he limited freedom for slaves to only those in the rebelling states.

Lincoln opposed slavery but sought to appease slave holders with compensation. Frederick Douglass initially did not trust Lincoln. He first met Douglass at the White House in 1864. Douglass entered through the front door, a revolutionary moment in that time. When Lincoln sought his help with the war, an issue for Douglass was the fact that Black soldiers were paid less than white soldiers.

It took a long time for presidents to open the door of the White House to African Americans. President Teddy Roosevelt (1901-09) was the first president to invite an African American to a White House dinner — Booker T. Washington in 1901, shortly after his inauguration. The outcry led him never to do that again.

Franklin Roosevelt never invited an African American to the White House for meetings or official events, even though Eleanor Roosevelt was against racism, hired only Black servants and met with Black leaders. FDR's base included southern Dixiecrats; it is noteworthy that his New Deal policies effectively left many African Americans out as he refused to challenge racist laws.

After the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the white U.S. athletes were invited to see and meet Roosevelt. No such invitation was made to the African American athletes such as Jesse Owens, who had won four gold medals. A widely-believed myth about the 1936 games was that Hitler had snubbed Owens, something that never happened. Owens said, "Hitler didn't snub me — it was our president who snubbed me. The president didn't even send me a telegram." (Wikipedia) Roosevelt also refused to support an anti-lynching bill for the same reason.

Immigration and African Americans

African Americans for the most part are not descendants of "immigrants." That phrase "we are a nation of immigrants" misses the broader and deeper point of institutional racism and white supremacy. (Immigrants from African countries Libya, Somalia and Sudan are included in Trump's anti-Muslim ban. Those immigrants living here, however, are considered African Americans first and treated as such.)

Trump is just the latest of a long line of presidents who are condescending to those who don't look like them. The ruling elite have always shared the same view of white power and attitudes towards African Americans (and other minorities).

President Obama was an unexpected break from this racist past. Even whites who voted for him hoped that the issue of race and racism would be consigned to history. Instead, racism increased in the Obama Era.

Obama's actual policies were mainstream Democratic and Republican. He did little for African Americans directly. Despite this, hardcore white supremacists see America as a "white country" that has been undermined by the "other." Obama's "colorblind" approach to racism did not mollify them.

After the Civil War, for a brief 10-15 year period, former slaves won some real freedom and could vote. Some were even elected to office. But the counterrevolution against the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments reversed all that progress.

Slavery as a system never returned. It was less efficient and profitable than wage slavery. But Blacks were not paid equal wages. White workers falsely believed that their situation was improved because of the super exploitation of African-American labor.

It took 100 years to get back the vote in the post-slavery South. Some 50 years after the vote was won, it is being suppressed again; civil rights are under attack.

White nativism is again on the rise and more blatant under the Trump regime. Steps are being systemically prepared to suppress voting rights as occurred after Reconstruction, and now after the election of Obama.

Resistance is Key

The mass protests show that African Americans, women and others know that the electoral system is not the solution to real life institutional discrimination.

Although Trump and his white nationalist advisers and counselors seek to use executive orders, the Congress and Supreme Court to impose a new presidential dictatorship, the public is not ready to give in. But while a majority are opposed to racist and anti-immigrant policies, sentiments alone aren't enough to stop the right.

The ruling class knows that its control of the state depends on public acceptance of the system as it is. Immoral and unjust laws and orders by Trump and his backers must be met by civil disobedience — the active, public, conspicuous breach of the law to bring about a change in law or public policy. The Civil Rights movement broke segregation laws by design, to force Federal action and fundamental change.

Congressperson and civil rights leader John Lewis of Georgia says Trump is an illegitimate president. Trump angrily replied that Lewis never accomplished anything and should fix his "inner city."

The authoritarian president will always blame those he fears as the enemy. He hits the "fake media" first, then all critics. The battle to defeat Trump's regime will require the same determination as that of earlier generations.

The goal of opponents, including those of the far left, should be to make the Trump presidency ungovernable. In that struggle revolutionary change is possible.

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