

Commentary and Discussion

Hello,

I was wondering if anyone was involved in the sanctuary movement in the 1980s? I am trying to get a sense of lessons learned, weaknesses, successes etc from that experience.

In NYC the sanctuary stuff is popping up. Any advice, books to read etc would be very, very appreciated.

Shemon



All,

The following is an email string focused on Trump and the immediate conjuncture. The initial comments came in response to an observation that we had less discussion material for the March 1 Bulletin than we have had over the past several months.

Rod

Everyone,

I think there are political reasons for the fall-off in material--the last three issues were very event- and movement-driven, first by the

election and ensuing debate, then by the inauguration and women's march and finally by the upsurge around the immigration order. Not surprisingly, the amping up of our own energies was fed by the amping up of general movement energies. The movement now seems to be in a pause. Trump has overcome the immediate chaos and dysfunction of his government and has also learned some things and is proceeding in a way designed to minimize opportunities for public protest. We are taking a bad hit on undocumented immigrants, with the initiative on ICE's side, and this may be one focus for debate--how respond to a challenge that is planned to hit people in dispersed locations and maximum vulnerability, minimum chance for fightback. As I've said before, I think another challenge will present itself when police street actions ratchet up in the next months--how fight back against that? Finally, as Jesse Lemisch's post reminded us, we have to figure out how to keep the anti-Trump sentiment from solidifying as an appendage of the Democrats.



So there is a lot to talk about! Hopefully we can get some discussion of this present situation, where it is likely to go, and what we can do, as part of the next issue.

Chris

Chris and All,

I agree with your specific recommendation, and your assessment of the reasons for the rhythms of discussion.

Regarding Trump. What I find is just when I think he is

'normalizing,' he is setting off an avalanche, and just when I think he is crossing the line, he pulls back. This may be a certain savvy he should be given credit for. That said, I think three things: 1) I think Russia continues to lurk in a possibly lethal way; 2) I think the assault on the press, now not just words but censorship, needs to be met forcefully, and I hope (but am not sure) that it will be; 3) I think the deportation offensive should be the focus of the entire movement, and should be massive. Have activists spent themselves? That would be truly unfortunate.

Rod



Rod and others,

I agree with most of Rod's points. To add one or two thoughts:

(1) I think we should not expect Trump to normalize politically. Rather, I think he's cohering and tuning a two track operation, with the authoritarian hard-rights forming his more public face while the capable bureaucrats--whether hard=right like Sessions or more mainstream like McMaster, handle the bureaucracy and its relations with other government entities, including foreign. But this needs more discussion.

(2) I agree on the press and think this is a potential showdown point where Trump could lose decisively but also might conceivably win decisively.

(3) I agree that the deportation offensive should be a focus for fightback by the whole movement--not the only focus, which I don't

think Rod meant--but also that it's not easy to fight back collectively against an attack that comes in multiple simultaneous locations against individuals at home (or on the sidewalk outside), in early hours, where the deportation force is itself gung-ho (see link below), and where the airplanes are owned by ICE and take off from nonpublic parts of airports. I don't know the answers here, but these are the problems a fightback has to solve.

(4) Last, a lot of what Trump is doing is political in the narrow sense, that is, to build up or shore up his base. That's the link between the attack on the press and the deportation campaign--one insulates his base from any other views, the other is payoff for a core promise.

All this said, what's taking place among us now is a political discussion of the conjuncture so maybe it should be opened out to the whole list and will stimulate more back and forth.

Chris



All,

I agree with most of this. I have been stressing the importance of organizing against deportations for some time. But Trump is running a broadband attack: on immigrants, on the environment, on education, on health care, on the media ... and there will be more. It will be necessary to link various struggles together, and

the focus will shift.

The McMaster appointment will be an interesting case. McMaster appears to be a tough minded and intelligent advocate of a more mainstream foreign and security policy. In that case, he will come up against Bannon, Miller and company. My guess is that Trump appointed McMaster to calm nervous Congressional Republicans, but that Trump will side with Bannon and try to marginalize McMaster and the NSC. But we will see.

Finally: I think that it's a mistake to judge Trump by the standards of conventional politics. Those who judged him that way in the election campaign were way off. He is pursuing the same strategy now -- or, perhaps, Bannon is pursuing it, since I think that Bannon is the strategist. They are trying to create facts on the ground, pushing hard to lock down as much as they can as fast as they can. Despite the resistance and turmoil they create, they will push on as long as they can. They face majority opposition, but they have a hard core of fanatic supporters. They may unravel, but I don't think that will happen in the immediate future.

Jack



All,

Along the lines of my previous email, see the following:
http://wapo.st/2mpQVQB?tid=ss_fb

Jack

Everybody,

Two events of likely significance I noticed today:

1. Darryl Issa, rightwing congressman from California and a Trump supporter announced that he is for an independent prosecutor to look into the Trump-Russia connections and that he thinks Attorney General Jeff Sessions should recuse himself. I believe this reinforces the notion that the Russia stuff is big deal that is not going to go away. I suspect the tax returns may offer something here. Hopefully, the Republicans willing to publicly oppose Trump will grow, however slowly.



2. H.R. McMaster, Trump's national security adviser, announced today that he is against the term "radical Islamic terrorism" because he thinks it castigates an entire religion and will ultimately harm to US security. He said he's "not on board with that." He also said that he sees Russia as a major enemy. This is directly counter to what Trump has said. We'll see whether McMaster - and Mattis, Kelly, and (perhaps) Tillerson - are prepared to play the role of "legitimate" cover for Trump/Kushner/Bannon/Miller/Gorka or whether they have the guts to stand up to them. They may see themselves as representatives of "establishment foreign policy" hoping to influence Trump in their direction or perhaps doing something more forceful, e.g., fencing Trump in and/or challenging Bannon et. al. From all reports, McMaster is no marshmallow, so it will be interesting to see what happens. Whether by design or by

accident, the Trump administration appears to be split into Bannonites, on the one hand, and traditionalists, on the other.

Two other things of note from this week's media.

1. Six out of ten respondents in a recent poll said they are in favor of undocumented people now living in the country staying in the country and becoming citizens. Another 13% said they are in favor of undocumented people who are already here staying but not becoming citizens.

2. Fifty-five percent of respondents to a recent poll say they feel that Trump is "embarrassing."



One takeaway, at least for me, is: that while Trump's base may (still) be solid, he is not winning over the center. Quite the contrary; note, e.g., the recent incident on an airliner where a man (obviously a Trump supporter) made nasty/racist remarks to a Pakistani couple, and the other passengers made such a stink about it (including one woman yelling, "This is not Trump's America!") that the man and his wife were kicked off the plane.

Ron

Everyone,
Interesting article in today's N.Y. Times (sorry, unable to enable link):
<https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/health/congress-recess-protest-planned-parenthood-obamacare.html?>

Peace,
Bill

All,

The debate among the candidates for DNC chair (on CNN tonight) filled me with dread: they seek to capture and redirect the wonderful energies rising from the streets. This meant that, paradoxically, whoever was better was therefore worse. I couldn't see what all the Bernie-ite noise for Ellison was based on. There was lots of rhetoric and platitudes. I was glad that they seemed generally to have picked up on the cries for impeachment. The pro-Israel consensus horrified me: we'll never get out of the world-wide mess that US support of Israel brings. Overall, it confirmed my feeling that in American history significant positive change originates outside of the sterile two-party system. I just hope people don't allow this shit to domesticate their energies.

Jesse

All,

On McMaster the story I saw was not a public announcement, rather a report on what he told his staff and what they told NYT. (Link below.) But Ron may have seen something else.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/24/us/politics/hr-mcmaster-trump-islam.html>

Ron, links always desirable. I'd love to see the poll story and also the one on the airliner incident.

Chris

Everybody,

Chris is correct; the McMaster statement was made to his staff. Still, I think it is very significant, at least as a gesture to stake out his turf, and a daring de facto challenge to Trump. He can't not know that what he said is in contrast to what Trump has said, since Trump made such a big issue about it during the campaign.

I can't remember where I read about the polling results or the airliner incident (which I believe was reported in several places). If people are interested, I would check politico.com and the Washington Post.

Ron

All,

I believe that there probably are polls showing strong opposition to Trump's policies towards undocumented immigrants. After all, his approval rating is below 40 percent. What we don't have, at least not yet, is a mass movement. There have been hopeful signs -- Standing Rock, the Women's Marches, the push back at town hall meetings. Unless and until there's more, and more focused, opposition, and probably until it's closer to the 2018 midterm elections, Congressional Republicans will put up with Trump in order to get cuts to taxes on corporations and wealth, cuts to health care, to social safety net programs, to environmental and financial regulations, to public education, etc. Meanwhile, Trump and Bannon will continue to do all they can to dismantle much more, and to try to marginalize institutions that they can't control (the NSC may be one of these). So here's a passage from the Washington Post article whose link I sent a few emails ago, including a very clear statement of intent from Bannon:



"Atop Trump's agenda, Bannon said, was the "deconstruction of the administrative state" — meaning a system of taxes, regulations and trade pacts that the president and his advisers believe stymie economic growth and infringe upon one's sovereignty. 'If you look at these Cabinet nominees, they were selected for a reason, and that is deconstruction,'" Bannon said. He posited that Trump's announcement withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership was "one of the most pivotal moments in modern American history.'

Jack

All,

Here's a follow-up on McMaster:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/us/politics/hr-mcmaster-trump.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news>

Chris

All,

On a conference call last night I proposed: (1) if there were no existing rapid response networks or GDC's in an area, that @ and allied groups (in particular, U&S, M1 IWW locals) attempt to form one; (2) if there were some, even if organized by non-profits or local politicians, that @ and allied groups participate as a radical/revolutionary pole. In any case the groups should stand for non-partisanship/non-electoralism; democratic structures and decision-making; and not only raising slogans like, Stop Deportations and No Wall, but also ones like No One is Illegal and Open Borders. I got some positive feedback, but no decisions were taken on the call. More later.

Peace,
Bill



P.S. Below is a link to an interesting article from Chicago, where an alderman is sponsoring a rapid response network that is seemingly willing to engage in blockades and militant civil disobedience. All the more reason

to emphasize non-partisan/non-electoralism.

<http://chicago.suntimes.com/politics/brown-neighbors-joining-together-to-block-trump-deportations/>

Hi Folks,

Today I went to an event at Ethical Culture in Riverdale (in the NW Bronx) where "Indivisible" held a meeting that drew about 70 or more people, which is the biggest event I've ever seen at Ethical Culture over the last few years. Many people were from churches & synagogues in the NW Bronx. While their main strategy is electoral as they have a significant focus on trying to get support from elected officials, a number of folks were also committed activists who came together to plan outreach for immigrants and supportive safe havens. When I got home, I researched the group and discovered that they exist all over the country. Having researched the Tea Party's strategy of local community organizing, that's their focus and they are using that approach in many areas around the country in support of immigrants. So although their approach is quite liberal, it might be worth checking out to see what they're doing in different areas, as their outreach seems pretty significant.

While May 1st makes sense as Mexico's labor day, it's also just two days after the scheduled People's Climate Mobilization that is happening on Saturday, April 29th in Washington, DC. And 350.org is doing a lot of work to organize for this march, somewhat similar to what they did in preparation for the Climate March in the fall of 2014. While they're likely different segments of people, two significant marches within two days of each other isn't the best idea.

Mary

Everybody,

For those who may be interested in some names from the past:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2017/02/25/the-captive-mind-of-trump-true-believer-david-horowitz.html>

Ron

All,

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose. He was always a liar, even as a leftist. His early book, The Free World Colossus (1965) contained among other things a complete parroting of the Stalinist line on Eastern Europe. Then there was Empire and Revolution (1969), which as I remember opened and closed a brief Trotskyist phase. Then he moved right and continued lying.

CH

Everybody,

For those who want to understand Trump's 'management' style, check this out:

<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/02/hes-a-performance-artist-pretending-to-be-a-great-manager-214836>

Ron

All,

Ernesto Burbank is very clear and still loving in this update and "analysis" of what is at stake. Please watch

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH7_w23m3Ks

Brian

FYI,

Subject: Farber article on socialists and free speech

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/garton-ash-free-speech-milo-yiannopoulos/>

Jack

All,

A very cogent article/newsletter on Capitalism/Corporatism/Privatization as opposed to The Commons

as a means of creating and distributing goods and services far more fairly. Sorry, the "richies" will have to give up a bit!

Brian



A snapshot from the future: You drive your kids to school, go to work, the hospital or a movie and you are charged for every mile of road you use through an EZ Pass. The road has been developed and maintained by a bond funded by wealthy investors at very high interest rates. The investors are the first on the list to be paid, since the city needs to keep a strong bond rating in order to borrow more from investors.

Bruce Dixon, editor of [Black Agenda Report](#), writes, in "[EZ Pass — Tip Of The Road Privatization Vacuum Cleaner](#)," that trade associations and lobby groups are working toward 'pay-to-use' roads in the near future. Roads will be privatized or become public-private partnerships. If we are unable to pay, we cannot use the roads or may even lose our license. Dixon points out that under the Obama administration toll lanes were allowed on more existing highways to advance toward privatized roads.

This is the essence of privatization today: turn a public good into a profit center for Wall Street. US economic policy has created a wealth class that is grotesquely wealthy and under-taxed so it has the money that the government needs to provide public services. This forces the government to borrow money from or sell a public service to the privateers or to create a public-private partnership (disguised corporate welfare and crony capitalism) in order to provide essential services.

This model was applied during the Obama years on a mega-level to health care. Rather than treating universal health care as [a public service and expanding and improving Medicare to cover everyone](#), Obama worked with corrupt healthcare profiteers – the insurance and pharmaceutical industries and health care investors – for a law that

benefited them. We described Obamacare as "[the biggest insurance scam in history](#)" in 2013, predicting it would lead to increased premiums, out-of-pocket costs and deductibles and decreased coverage while making the medical industry wealthy – this is exactly what happened.

The Market Rules While Public Services Are Cut

Under Obama and previous presidents, the market was king while public services were diminished or disappeared. Obama is infamous for his triad of trade agreements: the [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#), the [Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership](#) and the [Trade in Services Agreement](#). The common theme of all three was privatization by granting greater power to corporations, making it impossible to regulate them, and turning public services into profit centers for big business.

The TPP and TTIP both seem to be dead. It is unclear what the fate of TiSA will be under President Trump, but [we must not allow it to be completed](#). Last week Trump said he wants no more multi-country trade deals and will pursue one-on-one negotiations where the US can demand terms from a smaller country and easily walk away if the country refuses. [TiSA is a grave danger](#). It is an agreement of 52 nations (including all of Europe) and from [numerous leaks](#) we [know](#) the thrust of TiSA is privatization of all services. Services are 80 percent of the US economy and include the postal service, education, health care, etc. TiSA creates a one-way street to privatization with incentives to push public services to be privatized. Once this is done, they cannot return to the public sphere. Recent leaks show that [TiSA negotiators are having problems](#), but if they make compromises, TiSA may still survive.

A major area in the US where we have seen privatization destroying a critical public service under the last four presidents is education. The damage is expected to increase under the [extremist](#) policies of Secretary [DeVos](#), although [she is igniting protest](#) (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Education activist, Morna McDermott, writes about the path to privatize education in "[The Long Game: Where Art Thou Public Education?](#)". She points to the extremist "Choices in Education Act," which would open the flood gates of privatization schemes like vouchers and charters, but she also points out that the Democrat's answer to No Child Left Behind, The Every Student Succeeds Act ([ESSA](#)), does the same.

Education ['deform' is rooted in the lesser evilism of the two-party problem](#) of the United States. While both parties clothe their deforms in nice-sounding labels, the reality is that both parties are privatizing education so big profits can be made off of school budgets while students suffer from a deteriorating education system. The privatizers can afford the best Madison Avenue propagandists available, but in reality words like

[‘education choice’ have never served the disadvantaged](#) but play on people’s desperation and have [racist roots](#).

In Baltimore, we may be seeing the end of public education through the starvation of public schools. The [public schools currently have a \\$130 million shortfall](#), which is likely to mean firing 1,000 educators. Not only will this devastate Baltimore schools, it will undermine the Baltimore economy. When you starve a public budget, people get desperate, including parents, teachers, students and residents; desperation is an opportunity for privatizers to come in and “save the day,” a disguise for the privatization, profiteering and destruction of public education. Adding to the concerns is that Baltimore “School Choice” advocate Jason Botel is now the second in command under DeVos. Will Baltimore be an experiment for full privatization of public schools?

This week the [Trump administration moved backward on the issue of private prisons](#). Obama had taken initial steps to stop the use of private prisons, but Attorney General Sessions withdrew his order. Private prisons treat inmates poorly, whether it is the quality of food or health care, and require high levels of occupancy, which encourages more prison sentences.

Another problem with privatization is lack of accountability. Corporations often skirt regulations because they know that there aren’t enough regulators to enforce the rules and that even if they are caught, they only have to pay a fine. Their lobbyists work to weaken or stop regulations to protect the environment, workers or consumers because they interfere with their profits. Trump’s cabinet consists of [people appointed to federal agencies that they have been critical of or want to see destroyed](#). And regulations are being repealed, which will lead to expensive environmental and other types of damage.

The Trump administration has moved forward on the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Keystone Pipeline without environmental reviews. If one pipeline explodes or has a significant leak, the cost in damage to water, land and air will be massive. Cutting corners for profit will almost assuredly cost the government more money in the future.

The bottom line on privatization is well described in [an article on public-private partnerships by Pete Dolack](#). He points out we can expect to see a lot more public-private partnerships under Trump, especially for his infrastructure plans. This is just another form of crony capitalism, which will result in public money going to the wealthiest investors. Trump will cut taxes on the wealthiest and build infrastructure with private dollars, meaning profit as well as tax credits go to investors, not the public. Dolack writes:

"The contractor, of course, expects a profit from the arrangement. The government doesn't — and thus corporate expectation of profits requires that revenues be increased and expenses must be cut. Less services and fewer employees means more profit for the contractor, and because the contractor is a private enterprise there's no longer public accountability.

"Public-private partnerships are nothing more than a variation on straightforward schemes to sell off public assets below cost, with working people having to pay more for reduced quality of service."

What Is the Alternative?

There are alternatives to privatization, de-regulation and other policies that funnel tax dollars and profits to the wealthy. Author [John Boik urges](#) us to look at how we create "an economy of meaning," which begins with a rarely asked question: What economic system designs, out of all conceivable ones, might be among the best at helping us meet real needs? This question expands our thinking and creativity about the economy. It is not limited to capitalism vs. socialism. It is not just about creating jobs, but about creating jobs people want to do. By making well-being central to the economy, new approaches will be tried and, if they work, expanded. The current economy does not work for most people. As we re-think the economy, the centrality of well-being is a good foundation.

In a chapter for the book "[Moving Beyond Capitalism](#)", [we suggested the commons as the antidote to predatory capitalism](#). Concentrated wealth is derived by taking from the commons for personal gain in an undemocratic way. Public goods, lands and services are part of the commons that we should be sharing. Doing so would reverse the wealth divide and build our mutual prosperity, e.g. all should have equity in healthcare, access to the Internet and high quality education. Further, organizing and governing the commons requires group decision-making, which will help to reinvent democracy.

These are times of radical change. We are in the midst of an evolution. The old world is one of concentrated economic power that creates inequality and corrupt, hierarchical governance to serve concentrated wealth through exploitation of people and planet. There is another way. We've reached a tipping point, as evidenced by the worldwide revolt through Occupy, the Arab Spring, the Indignados and other movements. We can reverse the trend toward privatization and inequality by claiming the commons for our mutual prosperity. We can build a more just, sustainable and democratic world, a world based on the common good, in which people work together to solve common problems and create an equitable economy that betters the lives for all.