

Darkening Skies and Shifting Winds

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There is a global trend emerging. We are seeing an alarming shift in Western politics - an increasing preference for racist, patriarchal, and nationalistic right-wing parties and leaders. France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Belgium, Austria, Russia, Scandinavia, UK, and Ireland are all experiencing rising support for their ultra-right-wing constituencies. The ideological spectrum extends from right-wing populism to white nationalism and neo-fascism, often resulting in the targeting of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and women. Tribalism is ascendant, casting members of the opposing party as dangerous enemies, thus breaking down any chance of cooperative coexistence. The US has seen an escalation of this dangerous shift since the 2016 election.

What happens to nations when norms of acceptable behavior shift drastically? Behavior previously considered inappropriate is normalized and almost universally adopted. According to Charles Blow of the New York Times, Donald Trump is the "Normless President." As the conservative writer and editor Rod Dreher explains, "Trump didn't come from nowhere. George W. Bush, the Republican Party, and movement conservatism bulldozed the field for Trump without even knowing what they were doing." Be that as it may, we stand here today seeing hard-won victories for basic human rights and civil liberties being reversed and staring at a future that is alarming at the very least.

Too many longstanding policies and institutions are being unraveled all at once: NAFTA, the Global Climate Accord, the Domestic Clean Power initiative, the Pacific Trade deal, the Iran Nuclear deal, and the tax code. Rising gun violence is not being mitigated by better gun laws. At the same time, women continue to be targeted as victims, their right to choose being slowly obliterated and laws protecting their Constitutional rights disappearing one by one.

The latest assault on the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, is a thoroughly partisan, ill-conceived and ill-considered bill, hastily cobbled together by plutocrats and designed to cause maximum damage to millions of Americans. The new budget resolution passed by Senate Republicans would grow the deficit exponentially while 80 percent of the tax cuts would benefit the top 1 percent of the population by the 10th year of the plan. This is how "the biggest tax cut in US history" is likely to play out, gutting Medicare and Medicaid that sustain 55 million Americans. It is abhorrent that most

Republican lawmakers choose to ignore their constituents for political expediency. The US Supreme Court with Associate Justice Gorsuch on the bench ensures that states under GOP control and a highly politicized Congress will pass more and more draconian voter suppression laws. The real danger is that money and voter suppression laws could well enable Republicans to keep control of both houses at least until 2020 -- and, during that time, they can do even more to tilt the campaign finance system and narrow the electorate to their advantage.

Indeed, most Trump policies (climate, health, energy, and economic) are being made without consulting any scientists, without experts, without any alternative planning for replacing the systems he is unraveling, and without a political coalition able to implement any alternatives. The solution to this great unraveling is to flip the House and Senate in 2018. Are we up to this task?

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