

In Defense of Tactical Voting

With No Illusions!

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2018

My attitude about voting has been like the old Jewish joke about chicken soup when you've got a cold—it may not help very much, but it can't hurt. The more ideological argue that voting legitimizes the system, and they've got a point. The more pragmatic counter that such a purist position is an irresponsible luxury in the face of emergency—such as we in the United States are clearly now facing.

Donald Trump's presence in the White House makes the world a more dangerous place—and, as ever, it is the least powerful who are at the greatest risk—people of color, LGBTQ, women, immigrants, and the poor.

With Trump's ascendance, the empire assumes its most threatening posture. Trump inherited the wars in Iraq and Syria, but has escalated the rain of death on civil populations. Civilian casualties having jumped dramatically since he took over, as he had promised on the campaign trail with his “bomb the shit out of 'em” talk.

Yet he also played to isolationism, fooling even some on the left into thinking he was an anti-war candidate. Instead, this takes the form of his xenophobic police state. Refugees from Syria are barred from entering the country, as are Yemenis, Libyans and Somalis. The federal government is defunding sanctuary cities, and arrests by Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) have jumped 40 percent.

Trump is purging the Environmental Protection Agency of all functionaries actually concerned with environmental protection. He's lifted restrictions on offshore drilling, pulled the US out of the Paris climate accord, and approved the Keystone and Dakota Access pipelines.

He's escalated violence in Palestine and heartened evangelical eschatologists by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital. He's blatantly green-lighted Nazi attacks at home. He's repealed net neutrality, threatening to end effective use of the Internet to organize opposition.

In short, the far right has been installed in every branch of the federal apparatus, and is rapidly undoing all the reforms of the past three generations since the New Deal.

Beyond this, there is a sense that if not for noncooperation from the judiciary and elements of the bureaucracy (derided as the Deep State), a personalistic dictatorship—something actually akin to fascism—could be consolidated.

Recognizing these grim developments as retrogressions is not to give any imprimatur of approval to reformist solutions. From a perspective of moral economy, a social safety net, labor standards, environmental protection laws, net neutrality and the like can be seen as concessions wrested from the system by pressure from below.

This is most clear in the Dakota Access project. Its last-minute mothballing by Obama was a case of direct action getting the goods. It never would have happened if not for the hundreds of brave souls who camped out and faced police repression on the frigid plains of North Dakota for weeks in the fall of 2016. But it was also predictable that it would be promptly reversed under Trump—as it was. The pipeline officially opened in June 2017.

The 2018 mid-term elections will determine if there is any chance of a Trump impeachment, or if he will continue to have both houses of Congress under GOP control to push through his far right-wing legislative agenda. If

he remains in office, then the 2020 presidential race will determine if there is any chance of returning to the perhaps more insidious but clearly less pernicious pathologies of bourgeois democracy—at least affording us more breathing room.

Some will argue that it's a slippery slope—that acknowledging a difference between proto-fascism and bourgeois-democratic centrism inevitably leads to illusions about—and accommodations with—the latter.

This is indeed a real risk. But is it an inevitability?

An instructive analogy comes from Peru. Last year's election in the Andean country showed amazing parallels to that in the US. The fascistic right-populist candidate was Keiko Fujimori, unrepentant daughter of imprisoned ex-dictator Alberto Fujimori. She was opposed by a merely odious center-right technocrat and former cabinet minister, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, or PPK. Veronika Mendoza, a left-populist candidate, was bumped out of the race in the first round in April.

She then urged her supporters to vote for pro-corporate conservative PPK, so as to keep openly fascistic Keiko out of office—and to be prepared to build a vigorous opposition from his first day on the job.

It was a very close vote, but it worked—PPK won by the proverbial hair in the June run-off.

As if to drive home the point that PPK is merely a lesser enemy (but still very much an enemy), soon after his election he unveiled an economic program that calls for privatization of Peru's communal indigenous and peasant lands—and their sale to mining, oil and agribusiness interests. Land-grabs by corporate interests have already been a source of much rural unrest in Peru in recent years.

It really started to look like “Meet the New Boss” with PPK's Christmas Eve pardon of Alberto Fujimori—seemingly the result of a sleazy deal with the *fujimorista* bloc in Congress to keep PPK in power amid a corruption scandal. The ex-dictator was transferred from his prison cell to a clinic, and protests exploded in Lima and across the country.

I hope the analogy is clear.

We Yankees were last year faced with a wannabe right-populist dictator of our own in Trump. Following her defeat of left-populist Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries (by means fair or foul), the challenger was odious pro-corporate, Hillary Clinton. Sanders dutifully if grudgingly threw his support to her.

It is to be assumed that if she had been elected, she would by now be responsible for all manner of crimes and barbarities. It is also to be assumed we would not now be witnessing the current fascistic assault on bourgeois-democratic norms.

Here, alas, the wannabe dictator won. Partially this was due to the vicissitudes of the Electoral College. But an obvious difference between the US and Peruvian electorates presents itself: *Peruvians have known a right-wing dictatorship in living memory.*

If the risk of radicals getting co-opted by liberals is real, so too is the risk of their getting co-opted by fascism. The line that Trump was the lesser evil to Hillary was peddled by many progressive icons, from the Green Party's Jill Stein to Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

This speaks to our accustomed antipathy to globalization, neoliberalism and neoconservatism obscuring awareness of the possibility of things more dangerous still. Appearances by Assange and Glenn Greenwald on Fox News to poo-poo Russian electoral meddling points to an incipient Red-Brown Alliance, redolent of the politics of the Hitler-Stalin Pact period.

Anarchists shouldn't fall for this temptation either. There is also often an element of privilege to this equivalism, or Hillary-is-worse-ism. It is almost invariably espoused by those who have the least to lose from a fascist order. White middle-class abstentionists (or Green Party voters) are hardly the primary targets of Trumpism, and they are gambling with the shirts of others: from immigrants and other at-risk populations at home, to those now struggling to survive in the rubble of Raqqa and Mosul.

In the US today, fascism (or something damn close to it) is poised to take power *at home*.

The accelerationist (or nihilist, as it used to be called) position that “worse is better” because it heightens the contradictions and propels revolution does have some merit. Now that Trump holds state power, our actual resistance must be intransigently independent of all political parties, and unafraid of its consequences.

But consciously rooting for aggression abroad and police state at home is glib apocalypticism, rarely heard from those social sectors that actually have the most to lose from fascist rule. And the nuclear brinkmanship with

North Korea as well as fast-mounting signs of global biosphere collapse remind us that our resistance must be rooted in defending something for future generations to fight for—not in fantasies of a great purge. There will be no anarchist utopia on a dead planet.

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