

The fear and rage of intelligentsia



by Lev Tsitrin

I will be the first to admit that a single encounter has zero statistical significance, and no conclusions should be drawn from it. And yet, it is hard to resist the urge to pass judgement.

So here's what happened. The weather being nice lately, I decided to get again into my pre-Covid habit of picketing news outlets (like the local radio station, WNYC, and the local paper, the *New York Times*) wearing a sandwich sign that asks a question of why do they refuse to report what fascinates me to no end – the fact that federal judges gave themselves in *Pierson v Ray* a right to act from the bench “maliciously and corruptly,” and use it to brazenly defraud us of justice –

while no one in mainstream media bats a eye, as if this is exactly how it ought to be.

And so, here I am, standing for an hour in front of WNYC office in SoHo, armed with a stack of fliers, ready to give them to anyone who's interested. Not much business however, people just passing by without so much as looking at me – though a handful of guys were curious enough to stop and read my sign – and some fewer, kind enough to grin, and grab my flier. A burly, unsmiling guy from the building's security desk stepped out pretending to look into his phone as if reading a text, though clearly directing it straight at me. I was cracking up at this show, and yelled at him, "tell me when I should say cheeeese!" The guy barked out "if you want to," but come closer and took my picture. I pressed him to take a flier too. He hesitated – it could be forbidden literature! – but relented, and took it.

An hour of standing there was more than I could take, so I headed uptown, striking Broadway towards the *New York Times*. It is a longish walk (almost an hour, given the traffic lights on every block) so by the time I got to the 40th street where the *New York Times* building is located I felt a certain physiological need, and took a detour to Fifth avenue (a library at the corner had exactly the right facilities).

But before I could cross the Fifth toward the welcome relief, the interesting – albeit statistically insignificant – encounter happened. Someone overtook me from behind, turned his face at me, yelled "tell you friend Trump that he is a jerk!" and started running away from me across the Fifth avenue.

I was appalled. The light just changed and cars started streaming right at him. "Don't run into traffic!" I yelled, and seeing that he might indeed get run over (Fifth Avenue at 40th is very busy at three in the afternoon), he returned to the sidewalk, giving me a chance to pull out a flier and hand

it to him.

He pushed it back, and wouldn't take it. "You don't want to know how judging in the federal courts is actually done?" I was curious to know. "I do know," was his reply. "I worked for a federal judge, and many times saw him do exactly what your sign is saying, and what the picture on your flier shows" (I drew a three-section cartoon on it, the first section, labeled "judge's "problem"" showing a judge looking unhappily at the scale that showed plaintiff's argument outweighing the defendant's; the second, labeled "judge's "solution"" showing him looking happily at the scale which now showed, to judge's satisfaction, "judge's falsification of plaintiff's argument" weighing less than "judge's falsification of defendant's argument" – and the third frame, labeled "a solution for judge's "solution"" showing the judge, unhappy again, with a stubble and behind the bars). The guy continued: "judges do it for a different reason than Trump – a completely different reason." The light now changed and we were crossing Fifth avenue. "Trump does it for money" – he rubbed his thumb against his index finger in front of my face to make sure I understood. "And why do judges do it?" I inquired. "Just for fun?" But he had no time for me, and was gone.

Clearly, here was a highly educated person, in his early sixties I would guess – a tall, trim, well-dressed, mustached white gentleman – likely, a lawyer who at some point clerked for a judge. And this highly educated (and undoubtedly, highly intelligent) person instantly identified me as a Trump supporter, and in his rage, wanted to bark out something mean about Trump. Moreover, he refused to have a debate. To him, Trump was bad, period. To him, I was bad, period. Yet, federal judges were good – no matter how bad they were. End of debate!

What does all this mean, I wondered once I walked out of the library, the urge that brought me there no longer distracting my thoughts. What is the problem with the guy?

I think I found an answer. I think he saw in me a disturber of the status quo who reflexively reminded him of Trump, a disturber-of-the-status-quo-in-chief – and seeing in me the incarnation of the object of his overwhelming hate, he had an irresistible urge to relieve the pressure in his mind with an insult.

It does make sense – if the status quo is good. A member of the elite likely cannot bear a thought that a mere deplorable like myself would aspire to what the elites have all for themselves. Whatever America was at the time of President Lincoln, today it is run by the government “of the elites, by the elites, and for the elites.” If this is the right and proper order of things, and Trump “the populist” threatens to upend it (as do I, if I succeed), taking away the elite status of many, and the privilege that comes with being of the elite, then it makes perfect sense to hate Trump, along with anyone who supports him, with an uncontrollable passion.

I suspect this is what filled a person I met the other day at the corner of 40th and Fifth with so much rage that he forgot his manners and yells invective at me, a complete stranger.

Is that what ails all “never-Trumpers”? I won’t generalize – as I said, the sample size of one doesn’t count. But I cannot help suspecting that that’s what it is.