

The Trump Steamroller

As he piles up successes (and gaffes), the Democrats implode

by Conrad Black



As we settle into high summer and the period of maximum difficulty in finding anything to fill in hours of television news, especially 24/7 news television, two well-established political trends are emerging in this pre-electoral period: The president's opponents continue to dig themselves into foxholes that they will not be able to escape, and the president's tactical victories continue to be compromised by his verbal sloppiness. In completely nonpartisan terms, both phenomena are disappointing. The process of the president's leaving verbal lapses for his enemies to exploit, and of the Democrats and national media doing so excessively, is more complicated than it seems. The initial shock at the success of

this blunt and volcanic man who attacked all factions of both parties and assaulted almost every element of OBushinton political correctness and conventional wisdom, whose inaugural address was described at once by George W. Bush to Hillary Clinton as "some weird s***," has mutated into a fear that Trump presages a Dark Age of dictatorship, official thuggery, and oppressive know-nothingism.

They are failing to make the distinction between Trump's policies and his mannerisms. No serious person can dispute the president's economic successes (especially the virtual elimination of unemployment and energy imports), his revival of a viable policy of nuclear nonproliferation, taking serious measures to stop mass illegal immigration, moving decisively to address dangerous disadvantages in some trading relationships, and shaping up the Western alliance from an association of freeloading beneficiaries of an American military guaranty. He is the first businessman to be president, and he engaged in a policy form of zero-based budgeting. The underlying premise for climate policy is unproved and almost certainly largely false; he scrapped it. The notion that the U.S. performed a service for international development and world harmonization by allowing the Mexicans, Chinese, and others to pick America's pockets and export unemployment to the United States was false. He is scrapping that. The idea, cherished by Democratic politicians and Republican employers of low-skilled workers, that masses of people could swarm into the country undocumented, be exploited in the labor market, and not be counted anywhere, but still vote (Democratic) and use the welfare and education systems is an outrage. Trump is scrapping that, too. The country is tired of spending billions more every year on education to destroy freedom of expression in the university and produce ever-less-well-educated students in the unionized state school systems. He is attacking those problems, too.

The enemies of the status quo that Trump was attacking in 2016

were barely numerous enough to put him in the White House, but the number of those who are starting to appreciate the progress that is being achieved in critical policy areas is growing. Last week I wrote that the Democrats, who had been counting on the fatuity of treasonous Trump–Russia collusion, were now reduced to snobbery and myth-making, since they had no substantive arguments to make. That is true, but not the whole truth. Tens of millions of people in both parties loved the OBushinton declinism, both the randomly militaristic version of George W. Bush and the feckless cult of national self-doubt of Obama. It worked for them, and since it was a bipartisan arrangement, they had no idea how vulnerable it was. The Trump victory and his success in office have profoundly shaken those dependent on the sluggish, state-dependent ethos that gradually took hold between the Reagan and Trump presidencies, and have won Trump a creeping rise in the polls. The confidence that he could be evicted from office, if not in midterm, at least after one term, is evaporating; the fear and hostility of his enemies (and most of them are enemies, not merely opponents) is genuine, if not creditable, and it drives them to their own extremes of hyperbole.

Many are offended by Trump's bumptious style, though it is moderating. Most of these people probably weren't much impressed by the lack of panache of Ford, Carter, and the Bushes either, but that was only monotonous, not acoustically jangling, as many intelligent and gentlemanly people find this president. The additional element to normal political controversy with this president is that he is assaulting the citadel of the entire national consensus in a way that has not been done before in American history. Franklin D. Roosevelt took the headship of a country that had economically and psychologically collapsed; he had a blank check from the voters to clean it up as best he could, however he could. Walter Lippmann publicly invited him to ask and receive dictatorial powers. FDR rebuilt the system, keeping as much of

it as he could (though he got little credit for this from conservative financial and agrarian sections of society). Ronald Reagan had a mandate to restore American confidence and direction after Vietnam, Watergate, and the hesitations of the Carter era, the "malaise" in America. Both FDR and Reagan had clear mandates. Very few people imagined that Trump could be as transformative as he has been, given that almost no one in either party in Congress supported him at the outset. And for his enemies, the thought of what he might achieve in the next five years is seriously disturbing.

What is astonishing and unprecedented is that instead of fudging their differences with the president where he has clearly succeeded (as Landon, Willkie, and Dewey did with Roosevelt), almost all the Democrats have retreated into a more extreme dissent from the administration in every area and have amplified their personal attacks on him to a level unheard since Watergate, and apart from that, since the Civil War. The Democratic party has now pretty well locked itself into an inescapable confinement of commitments to open borders, free health care for everyone including those who enter illegally in their millions; a green terror that will disemploy millions and achieve nothing useful; open-ended reparations for about 80 million African Americans and Native Americans; a doubling of upper-level personal income taxes; and a definition of "reproductive rights" that extends to the killing of live, born, and separated children. There is no chance that the voters could possibly support any of this; it makes George McGovern seem like Boss Tweed, and Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda in the 1960s like George and Martha Washington.

President Trump, meanwhile, has cleaned up his presentation a great deal and is usually a fluent and authoritative leader in his remarks. Occasionally, and there is plenty of precedent for this in the presidency, he still produces a malapropism, such as his comment about the kidney and the heart (in support of an excellent measure he took, which will save tens of

thousands of lives of people awaiting a kidney transplant). But his deliberately offensive comments, such as inviting four socialist and racially controversial young congresswomen, three of them born in the U.S., to go back to the countries they came from, as it was tweeted, may be assumed to have been premeditated and designed to excite the werewolfish lunacy of the Democrats. It has worked. They are claiming that border control is an effort to retrieve an all-white America. It has somewhat empowered the four (very tedious and limited) women to challenge the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, who is finally forced to slap them down as a sinking Bernie Sanders embraces them, like Herbert Marcuse supporting Angela Davis in the Sixties.

And the waters are further muddied by an effort by the Obamas to deliver the nomination to Kamala Harris, requiring poor, aged Joe Biden to drop his "Barack and I . . ." intimations almost of Mount Rushmore and try to defend himself as if he were still assassinating Robert Bork and cribbing lines from a defeated British Labour-party politician (Neil Kinnock, now a trivia question even in Britain). Even the July 4 military parade, an exercise in pacifistic ceremony compared with Paris on Bastille Day, which is what inspired it, caused a friend of mine who is the retired editor of a well-respected newspaper to tell me it reminded him of the Nuremberg rallies. It was a Norman Rockwell July 4 festivity, not a pagan festival choreographed by Goebbels and Speer with hundreds of thousands of people screaming "Sieg Heil!" The question in everyone's mind – "What are we coming to?" – should be put to Trump's enemies. But they won't get to answer it; the Trump steamroller is accelerating.

First published in