

*Note: This is an article I wrote for the Global Greens Conference for those who would like a little more information than we might be able to cover in our panel discussion itself. – David Morris*

## **Green Action in the Age of Trump, Erdogan, Putin and Right-wing 'Populism'**

It's now 2017, but it feels more and more like 1932, the year when Adolf Hitler skilfully used the fear and anger generated by the Reichstag fire to gain complete control over all the levers of power in the German state.

Do we stand at the brink of a similar event...or one even greater in scope?

Was the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election a crucial tipping point in world history?

Are freedom and democracy throughout the world evaporating before our eyes?

Has a chain of events been set in motion that seriously threatens all life on this planet with extinction?

Is there anything at all that we – members of the Global Green community – can do to help stop it?

I believe that the answer to all of these questions is yes.

With Trump in the White House, the global drift towards 21<sup>st</sup> century fascism is on the verge of becoming a flood. Had things gone the way most people predicted last November and Hillary Clinton been elected, there may well have been more coddling of big business than most of us would have liked, but at least we could have counted on the United States to continue supporting the basic concept of liberal democracy. Instead, the most powerful nation in the world is now led by an incompetent, childish narcissistic blowhard who is either in the pocket of Vladimir Putin or – perhaps worse – simply shares his love of militaristic ultra-nationalism and autocratic kleptocracy.

At the same time, with Trump and his crew in charge, it isn't hard to think of plausible scenarios that would lead to the real possibility of nuclear war, global financial chaos or runaway climate change.

Suppose, for example, that Putin really does have damning kompromat on Trump and feels free to make an incursion of some sort into one of the Baltic states, but internal U.S. politics force Trump into a firm response. Putin then threatens to spill the worst of the dirt and Trump, being Trump, says something to the effect of, "Do that and I'm nuking the Kremlin!" Could we count on our two self-styled "alpha male" leaders to sensibly back down - or might their escalating chest-thumping lead in the end to an actual exchange of missiles?

Or what would happen if Russian forces down Israeli jets trying to degrade Syrian air defences? Or Chinese and U.S. forces face off over one of the artificial islands in the South China Sea? Or North Korea starts to deploy nuclear-armed ICBMs capable of hitting the mainland United States? Can we really rely on Trump to make the kind of calm, well-considered decisions needed to defuse crises such as these?

Trump's belligerent "America first" trade policies and his desire to destroy even the minimal regulations put on financial institutions after the 2008 crisis could also easily throw a monkey wrench into the fragile world economic system and lead to global chaos and untold suffering for the most vulnerable.

As we members of the Global Green movement are perhaps more aware than anyone, however, the greatest danger brought by Trump may well be in the area of climate change.

Suppose for a moment that Trump actually succeeds within the framework he has put forward. The U.S. would experience an economic boom with significant re-industrialization and the return of millions of jobs in fields such as production and mining. A key component of this would be a massive increase in the extraction of oil, gas and coal. With sanctions removed, Russia, too, would likely be part of this boom and there is little doubt that new U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the former CEO of Exxon-Mobil, would be all too happy to help Putin actualize their earlier plan to bring massive oil drilling to the arctic. Instead of – at long last – a serious effort to start addressing climate change based on the Paris accords, a Trump-Putin alliance is likely to bring full-speed movement in the wrong direction.

Deniers such as Trump are fond of saying that the science of climate change has not been settled, by which they mean that opinion ranges from the whole thing being a hoax at one extreme, to the IPCC warnings at the other. This is, of course, nonsense. The actual debate among real climate scientists ranges more from the IPCC predictions of catastrophe by the end of the century being the most conservative view to those who hold that a sudden release of arctic methane may well lead to a mass extinction of us and most other plant and animal species within our lifetime occupying the other end of the opinion spectrum.

Take your pick – war, economic ruin or climate catastrophe – if the runaway freight train of global authoritarianism is not derailed soon, the results are likely to be dire. And we haven't even touched on issues such as LGBT, immigrant and women's rights, freedom of speech and assembly, racial prejudice and economic inequality.

In a separate article, written in December and also posted on this site, I suggested that the installation of Donald Trump was not something that occurred either suddenly or in a vacuum. Rather, it was the result of what might be called a long-term, multi-faceted, slow-motion coup d'état. This was a very well-funded and organized project on which the right wing in the United States has been working tirelessly for decades, but in this election cycle there seemed to be something new.

That is, of course, the involvement of - and likely collusion with - the intelligence services of a hostile foreign power.

Digging a little deeper, however, we find evidence that elements of the U.S. Christian right have been in close contact with their Russian counterparts for years, and many of them have come to view Vladimir Putin as some sort of heroic defender of their version of (white) Christian culture. For example, well-known American right-winger Pat Buchanan wrote in 2014, “In the culture war for the future of mankind, Putin is planting Russia’s flag firmly on the side of traditional Christianity.”

While these revelations might not come as much of a surprise to our Green Party friends in France, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and the former Soviet republics, who have faced years of electoral interference from Putin’s Russia, it is still shocking to see the extent to which the current push for ring-wing authoritarianism seems to have become some sort of coordinated international movement.

In the face of such a juggernaut, what can we – the members of the Global Green movement – badly funded and relatively small in numbers as we are – do to help stem the tide and return the world to some sort of sanity?

The answer is quite a bit.

Professor Timothy Snyder of Yale University is a historian who specializes in the study of how Germany and other 20<sup>th</sup> century democracies descended into fascism. He sees many parallels between the 1930s and now, but says that we have one huge advantage – we have seen this movie before. We know how authoritarians try to undermine and replace democratic institutions and we know how important it is to actively oppose these efforts.

In the professor’s words, “Today, we are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to totalitarianism in the twentieth century. But when the political order seems imperilled, our advantage is that we can learn from their experience to resist the advance of tyranny.”

In a recent book, Dr Snyder offered twenty practical suggestions for how to do this, including:

*“Do not obey in advance.”*

*“Defend institutions.”*

*“Beware the one-party state.”*

*“Believe in truth.”*

*“Investigate.”*

*“Learn from peers in other countries.”*

and

*“Be as courageous as you can.”*

Excellent advice all, but let me add a few that might, in my humble opinion at least, apply especially well to members of the Global Green movement.

**Support progressive alliances** – At this critical point in the world, stopping the disastrous march of global authoritarianism is far more important than any personal attachment we might have to pet causes or progressive purity. Each national and local party should think long and hard about when we should fight elections with all our might under our own banners...and when we should be willing to offer our support to candidates from other parties who might not meet our standards in some areas, but who are honestly committed to an anti-authoritarian agenda. Our numbers might not be huge, but we can bring a lot of moral authority to the table, especially in areas related to the climate and the environment and social justice.

**Call it as we see it** – On issue after issue, from climate change to the need for systems based on tolerance and compassion rather than fear and xenophobia, the basic ideas of the Global Greens are right, and those of right-wing extremists are wrong. We should never forget this, and no matter how much ridicule we might get, we should be willing to stand our ground and speak the truth.

**Never let them normalize** – People like Donald Trump, Recep Erdogan and Vladimir Putin are not the natural “alpha-male” leaders they claim to be. They don’t represent me. They don’t represent you. And the more they succeed, the more likely it is that humanity will fail. In every way possible we should act to ensure that our fellow citizens do not start to see their way of doing business as the “new normal.”

**Never accept the unacceptable** – If Trump was acting as a knowing Russian agent, or if his minions really did tamper with some of the vote tabulating equipment in key states, his election is illegitimate and should be redone. To their credit, the Austrians redid their own recent presidential election for far less. Similarly, we members of the Global Greens should never accept policies which are based on sexism, racism and fear, no matter how popular they might be in some circles.

**Don’t fall for fake news** – Since the U.S. election it has become clear that a shocking amount of the “information” found on many progressive social media sites is actually professionally made propaganda traceable back to intelligence operatives. The sad fact is that we all need to keep our eyes wide open when looking at new information, especially online and approach unsubstantiated stories with a healthy dose of scepticism.

**Organize from the ground up, march, ridicule...and make a lot of noise** – It’s what we do. We should keep on doing it!