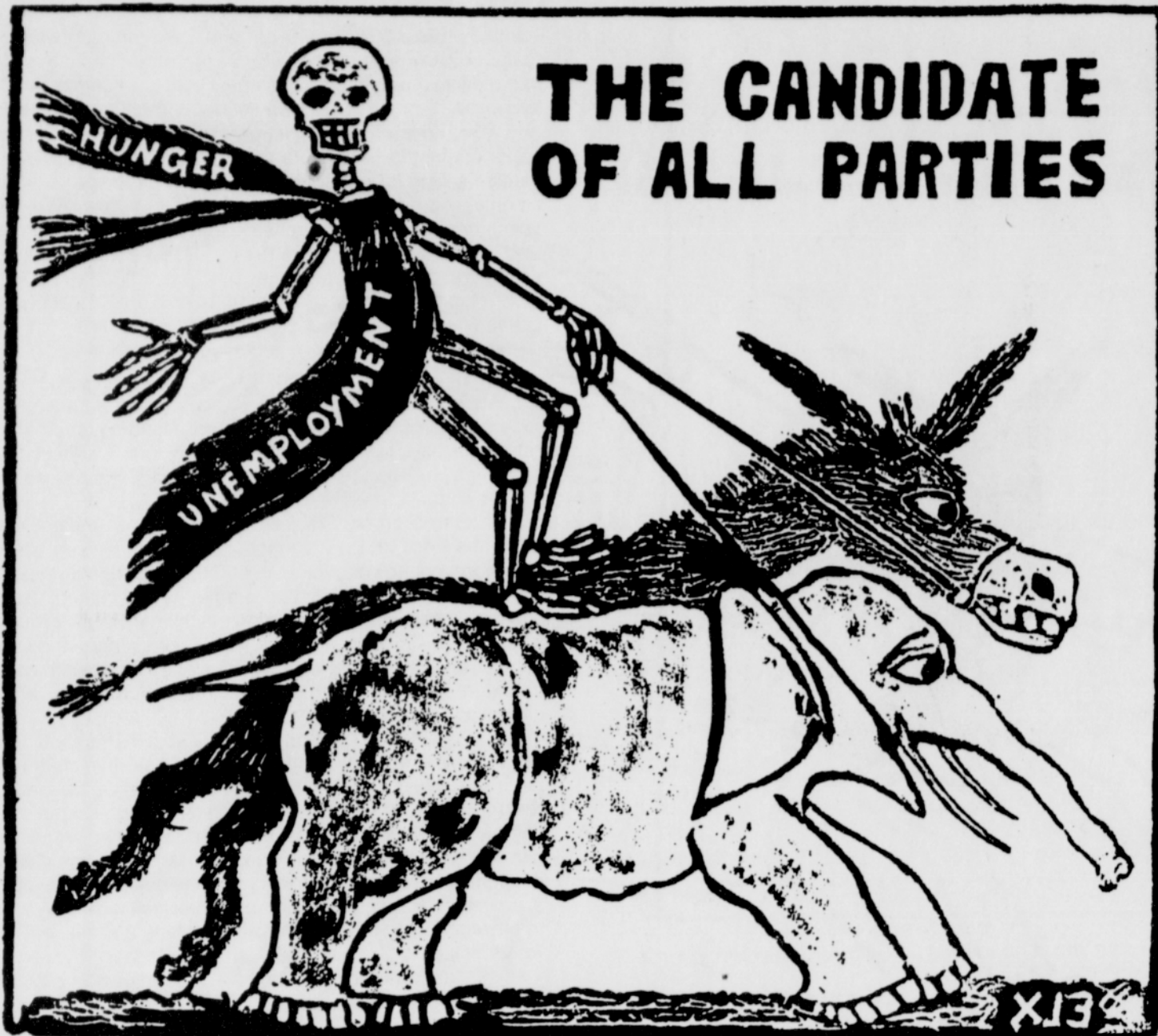


AMERICA'S NEW UNCIVIL WAR



BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"We must disenfranchise ourselves, and then we shall save our country."

~ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"When fascism reaches America, it will be wrapped in a flag and holding a cross."

~SINCLAIR LEWIS

The Presidential administration of George W. Bush is perhaps the most radical and reactionary in American history. Bush and his cabal of virulent rightwing autocrats are also more arrogant than any previous administration as they trample over Constitutional rights and liberties in blatant contempt of democracy, corrupting the basic foundations of this country, consolidating all power into their repressive grasp — under the misguided and exceptionally dangerous conceit that this President is the "unitary executive" with the (hierarchical) right to claim the powers of an old Greek Tyrant.

This new millennial period of U.S. history is one of intense political and social decline, perpetrated by intellectually dishonest and avariciously ambitious political and corporate mandarins who celebrated the end of the Cold War at the climax of the last century by beginning to dismantle any final pretense of Constitutional democracy while publicly ballyhooing it as if it were a tawdry commercial for indigestible pulp. Listening to George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condalessa Rice, et al, is like reading an elementary school history textbook about the greatness of America and the heroes who made it great with divine stimulation. They separate the American people into "patriots" and "traitors," and weave into their stern platitudes clumsily crafted slogan-speak earlier used in old communist agitprop such as their favorite "freedom loving peoples of the world" (to which they are exporting "democracy" through war), which they repeat nearly as tirelessly as "God bless America."

The keystone of the Bush administration is the USA Patriot Act, which has been dusted off from the Nixon era's appalling Huston Plan that was designed to eradicate domestic dissent but never fully acted because Watergate got Nixon first. Denial of representation by an attorney, suspension of attorney/client privacy, arrest and secret imprisonment without charges, these are legislative outlines of a police state, for now narrowly targeted on a minority (American Muslims) but soon to broaden to cover the entire society, as has the illegal secret monitoring of Americans' communications and reading habits, and most recently virtual obliteration of *habeus corpus*.

Precedents are being set that horrify most of the rest of the world, if not a majority of Americans: arrests without trial or right of attorney; people jailed for years without charges filed or indictments; secret interrogations that have recently been admitted to include torture (the President demands his right to torture whomever he pleases; and Congress acquiesces), all of these being conducted in the name of so-called Homeland Security against terrorism, but soon enough even that pretext will be discarded to reveal a perpetual iron heel.

Overall this presupposes diminished freedoms of speech and dissent in exchange for "security"; imposition of religion into government; accelerated suppression of civil rights of women, racial minorities, non-Christians and the poor (and consequently everyone else); curtailed judicial rights synchronous with rising police powers; and continued trickle-down and flood-up of the nation's private and public wealth.

In the meantime Bush has secretly been privatizing public resources such as the military (mercenaries), schools (parochializing them), the post office and IRS tax collections (repo-types not especially interested in public rights).

THE CANDIDATE OF ALL PARTIES

The President tells the nation in pure Orwellian doublethink that it will only have peace through war, truth through lies and liberty through repression. E. J. Dionne has recently written, "The conservative movement understands the political value of controlling the interpretation of history." Or in Orwell-speak: control of the past ensures control of present and future. C. H. Woodhouse wrote in a 1954 preface to *Animal Farm*, that Orwell "launches the 'long haul' of wresting back some of those cardinal, once meaningful words like *equality*, *peace*, *democracy*, which have been fraudulently converted into shibboleths of political warfare, and it is already impossible for anyone...to listen to the demagogues' claptrap about equality without hearing the still, small voice that adds '...but some are more equal than others.'" And that was Orwell's great prophetic fear: *some are more equal than others*. That imbalance has always been a major problem of historic relations, and a particular example is the self-serving fiction that America is classless.

Elites take root in every society and acquire unequal power unless a counterbalance restrains them. In a democracy that force of resistance is constitutionally the power of ordinary people. Political parties are formed to reflect and channel the passions of ordinary people and publicly represent them fairly, efficiently and powerfully — in theory at least — with a minimum of corruption and disruption, not to mention distortion of majority opinion. The two party system fails in this purpose. It is too exclusive and compressed, and it eliminates too many people and ideas from the actual process of governance. The insular filtration process of two political parties screens out nearly everybody qualified for public office and is so ripe for Constitutional infidelity that it extensively rewards a gluttonous minority over the interests of everybody else. The parties in reality serve politicians and their favored patrons rather than the voters.

The two party system does not represent the incredible variety and tenor of American politics, especially in recent years as population and cultural diversity have multiplied immensely. The two parties seem to be merging into a single megaparty dominated by a country club apartheid of wealth, property and multinational corporations. Several new parties are necessary to represent the unrepresented majority that does not possess equivalent wealth, property or power; and also to reflect gender and racial equity.

With only two parties through which to realize their oily ambitions, mainstream politicians show little interest in responding to minority interests or, in fact, to registering into the parties the millions of blacks, Hispanics or Caucasians poor who seldom participate in political activity. Although their involvement would swell party ranks, it would also broaden the base of each party and threaten the status quo.

The Democratic Party is traditionally the party of working people and minorities. Though its history is hardly glorious — in particular its advocacy of Southern apartheid in the 19th century — the Democratic Party usually, though reluctantly and always

narrowly, encompasses a mixed variety of ideas, philosophies and cultural styles that would otherwise find expression in other parties, which generally have little chance against the prevalent two-party system. Jammed uncomfortably into this single political party alongside a now virtually vanished core of strict constructionists are liberals, leftists, trade unionists, environmentalists, minority groups, feminists, and others who might be regarded as free thinkers, progressives and heretics.

While the Republican Party generally represents the aspirations and pretensions of wealthy Tories and plutocrats and would more likely include proto-Nazis than fuzzy-headed liberals, the Democrats switched their antebellum loyalties at the end of the 19th century to embrace the hordes of impoverished Mediterranean and eastern Europeans who were imported to work in the rapidly expanding American industrial machine. The old cadre of party bosses were never comfortable with the varied and volatile mix of political ideas these people brought with them, but liked their numbers.

Today's much maligned Democratic Party first began as Jeffersonian Republicans to contrast the power and wealth of the reigning Hamiltonian Federalist Party. Both parties were in contrast to George Washington's admonition that the new nation's division into political parties would be its ruin — the very fact the parties reflected as well as contained partisan differences would perpetuate political conflict, Washington felt; yet he reluctantly realized the conflicting views necessitated an organized system that would allow political representation rather than war. And so they have been with some exceptions when these differences seemed impossible to reconcile short of war, most notably in the 1860s. Now, once again our division of politics is sounding the knell of civil strife, with one party insisting on total power over the U.S. government.

Washington's anxiety became reality in the 1860s. The new Republican Party took the stand of union rather than secession, which was represented by southern Democrats, whom Republican unionists called the "Party of Traitors." Northern Democrats were even then considered the "peace at any price" party. But the Republican claim to have preserved the union is currently reversed: today's GOP seems hell-bent on dissolving it.

The "Party of the Rebellion" found its political platform from progressively mixed socialist and so-called liberal reforms; and in the 1930s the Democrats under Franklin D. Roosevelt engineered a major redefinition of government's role in American society. Often bitterly accused as the Party of the Left — "The Party of Traitors" that continues to resonate from the Civil War — the Democrats usually attempt to fix the national political structure after rapacious Republicans tear it apart with corruption, mismanagement and egregious hate campaigns against political adversaries, primarily women, liberals, racial minorities, and lately gays and lesbians and supporters of abortion. The real bankruptcy of the Democratic Party in recent times has been that it has done little to stem the wild surge to the right in American politics but has instead shabbily accommodated it with opportunistic envy muddled with political fear.

The general perception is that the Republican and Democratic parties are converging into a single party. Yet significant differences prevail. The Republicans act paranoid in their attempts at exclusivity and total dominance, each election campaign a further withdrawal from the incredibly and increasingly diverse mass of citizenry, while the Democrats, more by default, reflect that diversity perhaps because there is no other home for it as a result of GOP rejection and the unpopularity and powerlessness of third parties. Self-proclaimed as the "Party of the People," of disenfranchised workers and immigrants of the early 20th century as well as Vietnam War "peaceniks," the Democrats have in their campaigns the past century favored such liberal causes as labor reform, busing to achieve racial integration, abortion on demand, gay rights, abolishing capital punishment, gun control, greater representation in politics by blacks, women and young people (the 18 year old vote), and though Democrats were in power in most of the last century's wars in which the U.S. participated (or initiated), dissenting Democrats have been in the forefront of the demands that war be abolished as the nation's major instrument of world power.

Paradoxically, the only times Republicans were in accord with Democratic policies (despite streaks of isolationism) were during these wars; the power to make war is for them the essential leverage for rule over world affairs. In this the GOP shares the view of FDR and all Presidents since World War 2 that the immense wealth and power of the United States makes it "responsible for world leadership." Harry Truman, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Bushes 41 & 43 have been particularly tenacious that the U.S. be "Number One."

This more than any other dispute has split the Democratic Party the past half century — the ineffable question about the coexistence of raw power with civil rights. When in 1972 the Democratic Party platform said in part that "All Americans should be free to make their own choice of lifestyles and private habits without being subject to discrimination or persecution," it was not only Republicans who declared that Democrats "had been seized by a radical clique which scorns our nation's past and would blight our future." That year more Democrats defected from the party than in 1948 when two factions split off from the central party, "Progressives" and "Dixiecrats" that orbited outside Truman's axis.

The next great defection was in 1980: "Reagan Democrats," they were called, primarily white males fleeing, as in 1972, the increasing influence of women, people of color, *McGoverniks* and other riffraff drawn to the Democratic Party. Since then the Democratic Party has been in pursuit of its primarily conservative defectors, abandoning instead of shoring up its immense base of working people, racial minorities and women. The Democratic leadership signaled runaways that it was safe to return to the party because, a party strategist said, "poor black, Hispanic, urban homeless, hungry and other people and problems out of favor in Middle America will no longer get the favored treatment they got from mushy 1960s and 1970s liberals."

White voters switched from the Democratic Party to the GOP because they perceived it as a party of minorities (and immigrant "aliens") while party leaders and candidates regarded such a perspective as a liability. The political swerve to the reactionary right was precipitated by the gains of the Civil Rights Movement which set off a fullscale backlash revolt against minority rights as infringements against "traditional rights." White flight was also provoked by the mushrooming population of Hispanics and the flood of newer arrivals from

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