

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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A TRIBUTE



Alex Pajunas/The Daily Astorian

Michael Foster at his home in 2010.

Foster believed in Astoria when others scoffed

If you ranked Astoria's biggest curiosities, the Flavel home at 15th Street and Franklin Avenue would get the top spot. Close behind would be Michael Foster's Irving Avenue home — a three-storied pile that is equivalent to an art museum.

There are many ways of describing this town. And one is that Astoria is one big attic. Foster created one of the biggest attics within that attic.

I once spoke to Hal Snow about the size of Michael's collection. Hal revealed that he was an executor of Michael's estate. "That's why I hope I die first," said Hal.

"Michael has things in drawers that he doesn't know he has," said Snow. When Foster retained an art expert to catalogue his collection, the curator listed 3,600 works. And, admitted Foster, there remained an untold number of uncatalogued pieces.

When Michael's remake of the Irving Avenue home was in an early stage, he showed my wife and me the design elements that would make that home such an unforgettable experience.

Foster was a sought-after designer. That caused a number of people to retain him to decorate their living rooms. He did that for my parents when they moved here in 1971. When I became this newspaper's editor in 1988, I wanted to put all of the paper's historical photos and documents in one room. I asked Michael to hang them. Watching him work, I realized that he moved quickly and entirely from intuition. There was no drawing to work from. It was all in his head.

Belief in the future

In Astoria's immediate postwar decline, Michael did an important thing. He believed in the future of this place at a time when Oregonians dismissed Astoria as a rundown backwater. As John Goodenberger has noted, the town's size did not limit Michael's imagination.

A case in point: High schools much larger than Astoria have no scholarship fund of the size of the corpus of Astoria High School Scholarships Inc.

Not all of Michael's dreaming went somewhere. I watched him sketch the concept of a plaza between the Astoria Post Office and Clatsop County Courthouse, featuring a statue of John Jacob Astor.

For Michael, Astoria's darker history was a living memory. His grandfather, Charles, was Astoria's fire chief until the Ku Klux Klan prevailed in the municipal election of 1922. Charles was fired because he was Catholic. In 1927, he returned to office.

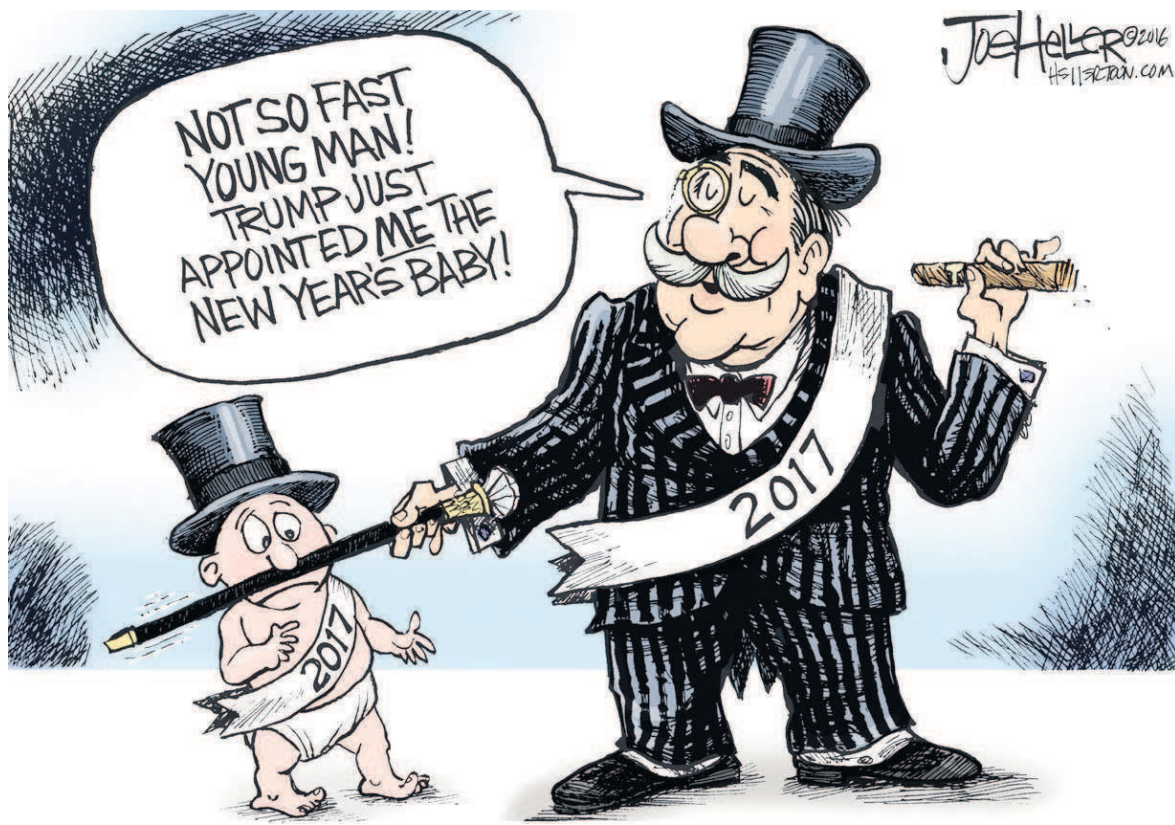
Eccentric and visionary

Michael was idiosyncratic. He understood that. When we assembled the book "Astorians: Eccentric and Extraordinary," for the town's bicentennial, another man who was creatively offbeat begged that we not include him among our cameos. Michael embraced the concept of eccentricity with relish.

But Michael was an acquired taste. To serve on a board with him involved — sooner or later — frustration. He did two great things for the Liberty Theater's restoration. He gilded a large portion of the architectural decoration. And he hatched the idea of creating a second-floor reception room, which became the McTavish Room.

There is a theory that the most effective economic development strategy for a town is to add and enhance elements that make the place attractive to its residents. That is precisely what Michael did. He was instrumental in making Astoria a rich cultural experience. It is providential that he lived long enough to see the town become a persona that was unimaginable just 25 years ago.

Steve Forrester is the former editor and publisher of *The Daily Astorian*.



Populism, real and phony

By PAUL KRUGMAN

New York Times News Service

Authoritarians with an animus against ethnic minorities are on the march across the Western world. They control governments in Hungary and Poland, and will soon take power in the United States. And they're organizing across borders:



national security adviser.

But what should we call these groups? Many reporters are using the term "populist," which seems inadequate and misleading. I guess racism can be considered populist in the sense that it represents the views of some non-elite people. But are the other shared features of this movement — addiction to conspiracy theories, indifference to the rule of law, a penchant for punishing critics — really captured by the "populist" label?

Still, the European members of this emerging alliance — an axis of evil? — have offered some real benefits to workers. Hungary's Fidesz party has provided mortgage relief and pushed down utility prices. Poland's Law and Justice party has increased child benefits, raised the minimum wage and reduced the retirement age. France's National Front is running as a defender of that nation's extensive welfare state — but only for the right people.

Trumpism is, however, different. The campaign rhetoric may have included promises to keep Medicare and Social Security intact and replace Obamacare with something "terrific." But the emerging policy agenda is anything but populist.

All indications are that we're looking at huge windfalls for billionaires combined with savage cuts in programs that serve not just the poor but also the middle class. And the white working class, which provided much of the 46 percent Trump vote share, is shaping up as the biggest loser.

True, we don't yet have detailed policy proposals. But Trump's Cabinet choices show which way the wind is blowing.

Both his pick as budget director and his choice to head Health and Human Services want to dismantle the Affordable Care Act and privatize Medicare. His choice as labor secretary is a fast-food tycoon who has been a vociferous opponent of Obamacare and of minimum wage hikes. And House Republicans have submitted plans for drastic cuts in Social Security, including a sharp rise in the retirement age.

What would these policies do? Obamacare led to big declines in the number of the uninsured in regions



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

President-elect Donald Trump attends a meeting at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla.

This epic bait-and-switch, this betrayal of supporters, certainly offers Democrats a political opportunity. But you know that there will be huge efforts to shift the blame.

that voted Trump this year, and repealing it would undo all those gains. The nonpartisan Urban Institute estimates that repeal would cause 30 million Americans — 16 million of them non-Hispanic whites — to lose health coverage.

And no, there won't be a "terrific" replacement: Republican plans would cover only a fraction as many people as the law they would displace, and they'd be different people — younger, healthier and richer.

Converting Medicare into a voucher system would also amount to a severe benefit cut, partly because it would lead to lower government spending, partly because a significant fraction of spending would be diverted into the overhead and profits of private insurance companies. And raising the retirement age for Social Security would hit especially hard among Americans whose life expectancy has stagnated or declined, or who have disabilities that make it hard for them to continue working — problems that are strongly correlated with Trump votes.

In other words, the movement that's about to take power here isn't the same as Europe's far-right movements. It may share their racism and contempt for democracy; but European populism is at least partly real, while Trumpist populism

is turning out to be entirely fake, a scam sold to working-class voters who are in for a rude awakening. Will the new regime pay a political price?

Well, don't count on it. This epic bait-and-switch, this betrayal of supporters, certainly offers Democrats a political opportunity. But you know that there will be huge efforts to shift the blame. These will include claims that the collapse of health care is really President Barack Obama's fault; claims that the failure of alternatives is somehow the fault of recalcitrant Democrats; and an endless series of attempts to distract the public.

Expect more Carrier-style stunts that don't actually help workers but dominate a news cycle. Expect lots of fulmination against minorities. And it's worth remembering what authoritarian regimes traditionally do to shift attention from failing policies, namely, find some foreigners to confront. Maybe it will be a trade war with China, maybe something worse.

Opponents need to do all they can to defeat such strategies of distraction. Above all, they shouldn't let themselves be sucked into cooperation that leaves them sharing part of the blame. The perpetrators of this scam should be forced to own it.

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Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy and verbal verification of authorship. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to

other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discard should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters referring to news stories should also mention the headline and date of publication.

The *Daily Astorian* welcomes short "in gratitude" notes from readers for publication. They should keep to a 200-word maximum and writers are asked to avoid simply listing event spon-

sors. They must be signed, include the writer's address, phone number and are subject to condensation and editing for style, grammar, etc.

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Or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103