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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

NOVEMBER 16, 2018

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18.11.2018

Barack von Obamenburg, Herr Donald, and Big Capitalist Hypocrisy: On How Fascism Happens

Caravan of Lies

Never underestimate the disingenuousness of top U.S.-American politicians. They truly have no shame.

Notice how little the fascistic president Donald Trump has to say any more about the big bad Central American Caravan that was supposedly menacing the United States with a great criminal “invasion”?

The U.S. military “heroes” sent down at great taxpayer expense to “defend our border” will be missing Thanksgiving with their families thanks to this fake threat to “national security.”

Gee, what happened? It was all a dog-wagging, white-nationalist ruse!

The bogus peril was transparently concocted by the neo-Know Nothing president to rally his “blood and soil” electoral base for the midterm elections.

That’s standard, crudely duplicitous procedure for the pathological liar Trump, who has spent years casting doubt on the reality of global warming (a “Chinese hoax”) even as he has built walls to protect his golf courses from rising seas resulting from the climate crisis he has acted as president to exacerbate.

The malicious racist family-separator and Arpaio-pardoner Trump is so used to falsifying fact and canceling reality that he may not even have known he was doing it when he called

his and fellow Republicans' arch-plutocratic, deficit-boosting tax reduction for the wealthy few a "middle-class tax cut" that was going to "[cost me a fortune](#)."

How did he come up the other day with the bit about the people who [don disguises to vote multiple times](#).

Orange Truth Crush is a funny guy. He's a [regular laugh riot](#). He's a one-man caravan of canard.

Just ask [Frederick Douglass](#).

"To Tend to This Garden of Democracy"

Then there's Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, a more elegant and polished kind of liar.

How did Obama keep a straight face when he invoked the retrospective specter of Weimar Germany and Nazism while [saying this](#) to the Chicago Economic Club last December?

"You have to tend to this garden of democracy, otherwise things can fall apart fairly quickly...we've seen societies where that happens...Now, presume there was a ballroom here in Vienna in the late 1920s or '30s that looked and seemed as if it, filled with the music and art and literature that was emerging, would continue into perpetuity. And then 60 million people died. An entire world was plunged into chaos...So you got to pay attention — and vote."

Set to profit from Trump's tax windfall, the corporate burghers atop the Chicago Economic Club always pay attention and poison "this garden of democracy" with big plutocratic campaign contributions and numerous other methods for translating wealth into political and policy influence ([election funding is just the tip of the iceberg](#) in that regard).

But I digress.

"Tend to this garden of democracy"? *As if that was what Obama did during his eight years in the White House?* Seriously?

Beneath expertly crafted fake-progressive imagery and branding, Obama rose to power in Washington with remarkable, record-setting financial backing from Wall Street and K Street election investors. Cultivating the gardens of popular self-rule was not the mission behind their investment, as Obama knew. "It's not always clear what Obama's financial backers want," the progressive journalist Ken Silverstein noted in a *Harpers'* magazine report titled "Obama, Inc." in the fall of 2006, "but it seems safe to conclude that his campaign contributors are not interested merely in clean government and political reform...On condition of anonymity," Silverstein added, "one Washington lobbyist I spoke with was willing to point out the obvious: that big donors would not be helping out

Obama if they didn't see him as a 'player.' The lobbyist added: 'What's the dollar value of a starry-eyed idealist?'"

An answer to the lobbyist's question came less the three years later: *priceless*. In his book *Confidence Men: Wall Street, Washington, and the Education of a President* (2011), the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ron Suskind tells a remarkable story from March of 2009. Three months into Obama's presidency, popular rage at Wall Street was intense and the leading financial institutions were weak and on the defensive. The nation's financial elite had driven the nation and world's economy into an epic meltdown in the period since Silverstein's essay was published – and millions knew it. Having ridden into office partly on a wave of popular anger at the economic power elite's staggering malfeasance, Obama called a meeting of the nation's top thirteen financial executives at the White House. The banking titans came into the meeting full of dread only to leave pleased to learn that the new president was in their camp. For instead of standing up for those who had been harmed most by the crisis – workers, minorities, and the poor – Obama sided unequivocally with those who had caused the meltdown.

"My administration is the only thing between you and the pitchforks," Obama said. "You guys have an acute public relations problem that's turning into a political problem. And I want to help...I'm not here to go after you. I'm protecting you...I'm going to shield you from congressional and public anger."

For the banking elite, who had destroyed untold millions of jobs, there was, as Suskind puts it, "Nothing to worry about. Whereas [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt had [during the Great Depression] pushed for tough, viciously opposed reforms of Wall Street and famously said 'I welcome their hate,' Obama was saying 'How can I help?'" As one leading banker told Suskind, "The sense of everyone after the meeting was relief. The president had us at a moment of real vulnerability. At that point, he could have ordered us to do just about anything and we would have rolled over. But he didn't – he mostly wanted to help us out, to quell the mob."

The massive taxpayer bailout of the super fat cats would continue, along with numerous other forms of corporate welfare for the super-rich, powerful, and parasitic. This state-capitalist largesse was unaccompanied by any serious effort to regulate their conduct or by any remotely comparable bailout for the millions evicted from their homes and jobs by the not-so invisible hand of the marketplace. No wonder 95 percent of national U.S. income gains went to the top 1% during Obama's first term.

A Blunt Neo-Weimarian Lesson About Power

It was [a critical moment](#). With Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress and an angry, “pitchfork”-wielding populace at the gates, an actually progressive President Obama could have rallied the populace to push back against the nation’s concentrated wealth and power structures by moving ahead aggressively with a number of policies: a stimulus with major public works jobs programs; a real (single-payer) health insurance reform; the serious disciplining and even break-up or nationalization of the leading financial institutions; massive federal housing assistance and mortgage relief; and passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have re-legalized union organizing in the U.S. But no such policy initiatives issued from the White House, which opted instead to give the U.S. populace what [William Greider](#) memorably called “a blunt lesson about power, who has it and who doesn’t.” Americans “watched Washington rush to rescue the very financial interests that caused the catastrophe. They learned that government has plenty of money to spend when the right people want it. ‘Where’s my bailout,’ became the rueful punch line at lunch counters and construction sites nationwide. Then to deepen the insult, people watched as establishment forces re-launched their campaign for ‘entitlement reform’ – a euphemism for whacking Social Security benefits, Medicare and Medicaid.” Americans also watched as Obama moved on to pass a health insurance reform (the so-called Affordable Care Act) that only the big insurance and drug companies could love, kicking the popular alternative (single payer “Medicare for All”) to the curb while rushing to pass a program drafted by the Republican Heritage Foundation and first carried out in Massachusetts by the arch 1 percenter Mitt Romney. And as Obama offer the Republicans bigger cuts in Social Security and Medicare than they asked for as part of his “Grand Bargain” offered during the elite-manufactured debt-ceiling crisis. It was at that point that hundreds of thousands of mostly younger Americans had received enough of Obama’s “blunt lesson about power” to join the Occupy Wall Street Movement, which sought progressive change through direct action and social movement-building rather than corporate-captive electoral politics.

We will never know how far Occupy might have gone since it was shut down by [a federally coordinated campaign of repression](#) that joined the Obama administration and hundreds of mostly Democratic city governments in the infiltration, surveillance, smearing, takedown and eviction of the short lived movement – this even as the Democrats stole some of Occupy’s rhetoric for use against the arch-plutocratic Mitt Romney and the Republicans in 2012.

Obama closed out his presidency by steadily but unsuccessfully working to pass the arch-corporate-globalist Trans-Pacific Partnership, a classically neoliberal so-called free trade agreement that had been under secret construction by multinational corporate lawyers and corporatist government officials for at least a decade.

How was that for some “[progressive neoliberalism](#)?”

How Weimar-Germanic and democracy-canceling was that?

Profiles in Courage

Just less than five months after handing over the White House keys and nuclear codes to the Orange Fascistic Whoremonger (OFW) from Hell, the Robert Rubin acolyte Obama had the mendacious audacity to [say this](#) in his acceptance speech for a “Profiles in [of all things] Courage” award from the Kennedy Library Foundation: “It actually doesn’t take a lot of courage to aid those who are already powerful, already comfortable, already influential.”

Obama spoke from experience!

“We live,” Obama droned (pun not originally intended) on, “in a time of great cynicism about our institutions... It’s a cynicism that’s most corrosive when it comes to our system of self-government, that clouds our history of jagged, sometimes tentative but ultimately forward progress, that impedes our children’s ability to see in the noisy and often too trivial pursuits of politics the possibility of our democracy doing big things.”

Who knew?

Nobody in the tony and tuxedoed Kennedy Library crowd stood up to tell “Wall Street Barry” that the U.S. had no “system of self-government,” [no real functioning democracy](#). Nobody rose to yell “You Lie!” and observe that, as the mainstream political scientists [Martine Gilens and Benjamin Page had shown](#) six years into his neoliberal presidency, the nation had for decades been “an oligarchy” where wealthy “elites” and their corporations “rule” and “[ordinary citizens have virtually no influence](#) over what their government does.”

Just months before getting his Kennedy courage award, ex-prez “O” was spotted [kiteboarding with Richard Branson](#), the British billionaire airline mogul who was leading the charge for the privatization of the United Kingdom’s National Health Service. Obama was photographed [boating in the Pacific](#) with Oprah Winfrey (another white-pleasing black-bourgeois “O”), Tom Hanks, and Bruce Springsteen on a \$300 million luxury yacht owned by recording mogul David Geffen.

The Obamas had recently inked an [eight-figure publishing deal](#) (\$65 million) for his-and-her memoirs on their years in the White House. And Obama was set to receive \$400,000 (damn near half a million!) for speaking at a Wall Street health care conference hosted by Cantor Fitzgerald LP.

It was called *getting paid for services rendered*. As Obama knew very well, nothing said “show me the money” like “President of the United States” on your resume – especially when you spent your presidential years serving the nation’s unelected directorate of finance, whose representatives held key posts in your administration. Call it the Audacity of Sleaze and the Venality of Hope.

That’s the kind of stuff that can feed “cynicism about our institutions” and doubt over “the possibility of our democracy doing big things”!

How Fascist Liars Get to Look “Authentic”

What does Obama’s epic and continuing corporate-neoliberal and Orwellian perversity have to do with Trump? Quite a bit, actually. In his important new book [How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them](#), Yale philosophy professor Jason Stanley shows how Trump and a broad range of far-right political leaders around the world [1] have how modern authoritarian and nationalist – “fascist,” if you like (Stanley obviously does) – politicians have used and subverted “democratic” electoral politics to gain power.

Many U.S. Democrats will read Stanley’s book with a sense of self-satisfied validation over his description of Trump and his party as fascists. That is a mistake. Not content merely to describe fascist politics, Stanley seeks to explain its success past and present. Fascism’s taproot, he finds, is harsh socioeconomic disparity:

“Ever since Plato and Aristotle wrote on the topic, political theorists have known that democracy cannot flourish on soil poisoned by inequality...the resentments bred by such divisions are tempting targets for demagogues...Dramatic inequality poses a mortal danger to the shared reality required for a healthy liberal democracy...[such] inequality breeds delusions that mask reality, undermining the possibility of joint deliberation to solve society’s divisions (pp.76-77)...

“Under conditions of stark economic inequality, when the benefits of liberal education, and the exposure to diverse cultures and norms are available only to the wealthy few, liberal tolerance can be smoothly represented as elite privilege. Stark economic inequality creates conditions richly conducive to fascist demagoguery. It is a fantasy to think that liberal democratic norms can flourish under such conditions” (p. 185).

Particularly perceptive is Stanley's intimately related reflection on how the political culture of pseudo-democratic duplicity and disingenuousness that is generated by modern capitalist inequality and plutocracy creates space for fascist-style politicians who "appear to be sincere" and "signal authenticity" by "standing for division and conflict without apology. Such a candidate," Stanley writes, "might openly side with Christians or Muslims and atheists, or native-born [white] Americans over immigrants, or whites over blacks...They might openly and brazenly lie...[and] signal authenticity by openly and explicitly rejecting what are presumed to be sacrosanct political values....Such politicians," Stanley argues, come off to many jaded voters as "a breath of fresh air in a political culture that seems dominated by real and imagined hypocrisy." Fascist politicians' "open rejection of democratic values" is "taken as political bravery, as a signal of authenticity."

That is no small part of what has opened the door to malevolent far-right politicians at home and abroad. The opening is provided by neo-"liberals" (in the U.S) and neoliberal social democrats and "socialists" (in Europe and elsewhere) whose claims to speak on behalf of the popular majority and democracy are repeatedly discredited by their underlying commitment to dominant capitalist social hierarchies and oppression structures.

He does not say so (this is a problem with *How Fascism Works*), but Stanley must know (let's hope) that the neoliberal Democratic Party of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has [partnered with Republicans](#) in the creation of a New Gilded Age of spectacular democracy- and tolerance-disabling class disparity. The [Democrats have participated](#) for decades in the richly bipartisan making of plutocratic policies that have shifted wealth and income so far upward that [three absurdly rich people](#) (Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Jeff Bezos) possessed as much wealth between them as the poorest half of U.S.-Americans while the top tenth of the upper One Percent had [as much wealth](#) as the nation's bottom 90 percent by the end of Obama's second term in office.

The inequality has come with daunting doses of soul-numbing hypocrisy atop the Democratic Party as well the Republican Party. Both parties/fundraising platforms have helped embody the cold and disingenuous "manipulation of populism by elitism" that Christopher Hitchens aptly called – in a [1999 study](#) of Bill and Hillary Clinton – "the essence of American politics." Obama staffed his White House and conducted policy in dutiful accord with the dictates of the nation's big financial institutions. So did Bill Clinton, whose key campaign watchwords of "hope" and "change" and strategies of

running on “the economy, stupid” and the promise of universal health care were stealthily pilfered by Obama in 2007 and 2008.

Then came the 2016 Hillary Goldman Sachs Clinton campaign, poisoned by the disconnect between her transparent elitist captivity to the nation’s top financial institutions and her admittedly tepid populist pretense. That pretense was undermined further when she got caught calling Trump’s “heartland” “flyover country” supporters a “basket of” racist and sexist “[deplorables](#)” in a sneering comment (one that [accurately reflected](#) her aristocratic “[progressive](#)”-neoliberal world view) to rich Manhattan campaign donors. (Here she gave Trump something like the same campaign gift Romney gave Obama when the 2012 Republican contender was heard telling rich donors that 47 percent of the country were lazy moochers).

This kind of disingenuous neoliberal Democratic politics did a great deal to bring widely hated Republicans into the White House in both 2001 and 2017. The hypocritical and elitist fake-progressivism of neo-Weimar-liberals like Clintons, Al Gore, and Barack von Obama opened the door for hideous monsters like George W. Bush (who believed that God told him to mass-murderously invade Iraq) and the more genuinely fascistic Trump by making the Republican candidates look comparatively “authentic” and (a point Stanley misses) by demobilizing and depressing the Democrats’ more authentically progressive popular base (non-voting was more critical to Trump’s victory than any big imagined wave of white working-class Trump votes).

True, no U.S. president has ever lied as voluminously and pathologically as the fascist Trump. As a brazen practitioner of the totalitarian “permanent lie” – “the consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth” (Hannah Arendt) – Trump is off the historical charts when it comes to barefaced falsification and fakery. Still, the tangerine-tinted totalitarian would not have gotten into office without the more sophisticated, stylish, and refined, establishmentarian disingenuousness of the party that Sheldon Wolin rightly called the Inauthentic Opposition – the dismal, demobilizing, depressing, disingenuous, and dollar-drenched Democrats.

The “Curse of Bigness”

The Inauthentic Opposition Party, it should be noted, has done nothing either in or out of the White House to stem another critical background factor in the rise of authoritarian right-wing politics: extreme economic concentration – what the Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis called “the curse of bigness.” Under the Clintons and Obama as under Reagan, the Bushes, and Trump, the U.S., writes Columbia law professor Tim Wu, has:

“weaken[ed] the laws – the antitrust laws that are meant to resist the concentration of economic power in the United States and around the world...we have recklessly chosen to tolerate global monopolies and oligopolies in finance, media, airlines, telecommunications and elsewhere, to say nothing of the growing size and power of the major technology platforms. In so doing, we have cast aside the safeguards that were supposed to protect democracy against a dangerous marriage of private and public power ...[and thereby fueled anger on the part of] citizens who lost almost any influence over economic policy and by extension, their lives...Their powerlessness is *brewing a powerful feeling of outrage.*” (Tim Wu, “Be Afraid of Economic ‘Bigness.’ Be Very Afraid,” *New York Times*, November 10, 2018)

It’s a feeling that fascist-style politicians like Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, Viktor Orban, Jair Bolsonaro, and others around the world [1] have powerfully seized and misdirected against immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, liberals, the left (fascists typically conflate the last two categories), urban professionals, and other convenient targets (including independent judicial officials, reporters, academics and other dangerous relics of “democracy”) while working with and for the very same structures and agents of concentrated corporate wealth and power that fuel the mass middle-class fury and indignation.

“The Blue Wave is a Corporate Wave”

The Inauthentic Opposition problem is alive and well in the wake of the U.S. midterm elections. In response to the totalitarian, fascist-style politics of Donald “the Caravan is/was Coming” Trump and the ever more openly Orwellian Republicans, the Democrats have not seen fit to follow Bernie Sanders’ [progressive-populist](#) lead to target the savage economic inequalities that Stanley rightly sees as an underlying cause of global fascism’s electoral march. The Democrats’ moderately successful midterm strategy presented no threat to the masters of capitalist inequality. The party remains wedded to the centrist, not-so “progressive” neoliberal formula that has reigned atop it since the 1990s: representational racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation diversity combined with an absence of any serious challenge to corporate and financial prerogatives. Its slight nods to populism and social democracy and justice are little more than calculating teases meant to keep more left-leaning, genuinely progressive, and authentically popular-opposition voters on board without scaring off big campaign bankrollers and backers.

As Nick Brana, the former Sanders staffer who heads the Movement for a People’s Party, noted one day after the midterms, the results are “a serious wake-up call for progressives”

who continue to foolishly dream of gaining power by taking over the Democratic Party...The *blue wave*,” [Branan writes](#), “*is a corporate wave* that has swept in the same kind of Democratic politicians that drove working people into Donald Trump’s arms after eight years of Obama. When Democrats busy themselves serving the wealthy again, the result will be an even sharper lurch to the authoritarian right” (emphasis added).

“Like a Cat with a Ball of Yarn”

The incisive left money-politics analyst Thomas Ferguson offered a telling reflection on the Democrats’ persistent captivity to the nation’s unelected dictatorship of money in a [Jacobin interview](#) published on the morning of the midterms:

“..the existing Democratic Party leadership is plainly trying to find ways to tap the burgeoning energy [provided by the Bernie Sanders ‘democratic socialism’ insurgency] for purposes of increasing electoral turnout, while *playing with the [Sanders] movement’s issues [single-payer and more] like a cat with a ball of yarn*....The hollowness of a much-touted Democratic reform proposal — that candidates should solemnly pledge to refuse corporate PAC money — is patent. It is a sham...They know very well that big ticket donations from the 1 percent will still roll in, in several forms...For Democrats to offer real solutions, the party has to break its dependency on big money. ...If the Democrats are not to go the way of the social-democratic parties of continental Europe, they need to squarely address this question and offer real solutions.”

(Ferguson’s ball and yarn analogy reminds me of the conservative Congress of Industrial Organizations [CIO] labor boss John L. Lewis’s also semi-anthropomorphic response to queries about how he felt about the significant number of radical [primarily Communist] activists who worked as CIO steelworker organizers during the 1930s: “who gets the bird, the hunter or the dog?”)

The main things distinguishing the new crop of largely moderate Democratic House members is how many of them are women and the remarkable amount of corporate money they raised, not any left progressivism. The centrist [New Democrat Coalition endorsed](#) 23 of the 29 Democrats who have won in the House race, as of the original counting (the numbers are going up as I write).

The “CIA Democrats” (as the [World Socialist Website cleverly called them](#)) also ran an unprecedented number of military and intelligence veterans. (I have not yet seen an analysis of how well candidates with such direct imperialist credentials fared in the elections.)

Under the cover of the [RussiaGate narrative](#) and the sheer horror of Trump and his herrenvolk Amerikaner party in power, establishment progressive-neoliberal Democrats in the Clinton-Obama-Pelosi mode have kept the authentically progressive and oppositional insurgency within their own party's ranks checked and contained.

Something New and Old: The Trumpenleft

Along the way, the dreary and duplicitous Dems have helped hatch an online political phenomenon the likes of which I never thought I'd live to see: a *de facto* American Trumpenleft. I've encountered it again and again on so-called social media and via e-mail. A strange group of mostly older and curmudgeonly online lefties (the new leading bane of my in-box, surpassing the Truthers in that regard) has been so jaded and enraged by decades of Democratic Party deceit and betrayal as to become unwilling to properly denounce and oppose a fascist president and his white-nationalist party. It's as if they think they are in danger of becoming neoliberals and being infected by the fake-progressive Obama-Clinton-Pelosi virus if they dare acknowledge the true fascistic horror that is Trump and his ever more insane party.

In some cases I have encountered, previously serious-seeming leftists have practically embraced Trump and channeled Moscow-hatched Caitlin/Diana Johnstoneite "red-brown" and "geopolitical" talking points [2] in the spirit of "the [nationalist] enemy of my [globalist] enemy is [somehow] my friend." Their understandable hatred of the neoliberal Democrats (whose evils I have relentlessly documented and denounced in book and essay after book and essay for many years) has poisoned their hearts and minds. It has gotten the better of them. It's a bit reminiscent of the German Communist Party's disastrous sectarian response to the political rise of the Nazi in the early 1930s.

The Trumpenleft is right to heap blame on the not-so leftmost of the nation's two oligopolistic state-capitalist and imperialist major war parties when it comes to the question of how mad-dog right-wingers like Ronald Reagan, the two George Bushes, and the "reactionary populist" Trump get into the White House. They can cite my own work, including this very essay, on that very topic – and on is truly terrible about the deplorable Democrats.

At a certain point, even the most dedicated left critic of the dreadful Dems one must step back from the Trumpenleft's derangement. This is over-dramatic, I know, but imagine responding to news of Kristallnacht (1938) by dismissively saying, "yes, but let's not forget the awfulness of Paul von Hinderburg, Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, Kurt von Schleicher, and the German Social Democrats!"

Some malignant tumors need to be attacked by any and all means even before the conditions that gave rise to them can be erased, before all the mistakes that allowed them to grow can be addressed.

Imagine not interceding against a frothing rabid dog as it charged a group of children because you know it came from a litter of other vicious hounds and had older siblings that long terrorized your neighborhood. Would shooting the rabid dog mean that you approved of the other animals wreaking havoc in the community? Of course not.

Thankfully, the Trumpenleft appears to be a relatively minor and geriatric phenomenon, tinted by no small hint of dementia – even with the best (if bizarre) efforts of [Trumpenproletarian dialecticians like Bill Martin](#), for whom Donald Trump is the Great God who succeeded in representing “the populism of the working class” where Bob Avakian was the God that Failed.

It’s not a pretty story. Ironically enough, I blame the Democrats for the Trumpenleft.

Endnotes

1) Trump’s fascistic comrades at home and abroad include much of the leadership of the U.S. Republican Party, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro Indian president Narendra Modi, Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte, Turkey’s president Recep Erdogan, Poland’s president Andrzej Duda, Hungary’s president Viktor Orban, (whose fascist government’s 2011 “National Avowal” promised to “Make Hungary Great Again”), Ukraine president Petro Poroshenko, and Russia’s president Vladimir Putin (chief of the “United Russia” party), along with numerous other dodgy fascistic nationalists atop the Five Star party in Italy, AfD in Germany, PVV in Netherlands, France’s National Front, Finland’s True Finns, Estonia’s Conservative People’s Party, Italy’s Lega Nord, Austria’s Freedom Party of Austria, Turkey’s MHP, Greece’s Golden Dawn, Armenia’s Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the UK Independence Party, Slovakia’s Slovak National Party, and Denmark’s Danish People’s Party

2) I opposed the blind following of Russian talking points when Moscow was in the hands of self-declared “Marxist-Leninists” (Stalinist bureaucratic-collectivists). I resist Russian talking points even more when Moscow is controlled by neo-fascist petro-capitalist oligarchs.