

Election Special: To Hell With Civility by Rob Bokkon

I'm so tired of re-writing this article.

The drafts kept piling up and piling up and piling up, one after the other. I'd think I was done, and then—here comes the goddamn news again.

Shock. Anger. Horror.

And again.

And again.

And again, but way worse this time.

I'm beginning to feel like a character in a Borges story, or a Lev Grossman novel. A chronicler fated to write the same story over and over again, only to find that he has to begin it all over, once more, as soon as he reaches the end.

Because the atrocities just *will not stop*.

As of this writing, bombs are still traveling through the mail to “the enemy of the people,” the media. You know, like the headquarters of CNN. Those are words, you may recall, said by the sitting President of the United States. You probably forgot that quote, given the torrent of appalling things he says daily. This most recent bomb came on the heels of many other potentially deadly packages sent to the leaders of the Democratic Party, including two former Presidents.



Poster found on Purdue campus this past week. Photo: Patrick Johanns.

As of this writing, two black grandparents are dead in my home state of Kentucky, shot down in the produce section of a Kroger by an avowed white supremacist who was heard telling another person of his race, "whites don't kill whites." The shooter was a white supremacist who had attempted to gain access to an African-American church just minutes before shooting up the grocery store.

As of this writing, a synagogue in Pittsburgh has lost eleven of its congregation. They were shot, by a Nazi, in the United States of America, in the year 2018.

The worst thing is: by now you're almost OK with it.

Stop. I don't mean you condone it. I don't even mean you accept it. But I do mean that you're becoming, more and more each day, *used to it*.

The nature of fascist violence, fascist politics, fascist ideology, is not insidious. It is not subtle. It is not clever.

Fascism is brassy. Loud. Bombastic.

Overwhelming.

Eventually, you start to tune it out. Whether from compassion fatigue or a sincere desire to protect your own mental health or just sheer exhaustion, you start to push it aside. Ignore it. Convince yourself that someone else is doing something about it, just so you can focus on the important stuff like getting dinner ready or taking out the garbage or your kid's grades.

Which is, unfortunately, exactly what fascists want.

They are counting on you to be overwhelmed. They are counting on you to change the channel. They are counting on you to see so much hateful rhetoric, so much ethnic violence, so much anti-LGBT+ legislation that you just can't anymore.

And so this, gentle reader, is where we are. We have actual Nazis marching the streets. We have a government that refuses to do anything about it, that is known to cultivate them for votes and political support, that only makes the most terse and backhanded of statements "condemning" them.

We have a Supreme Court likely to deliver the death knell to the last vestiges of a woman's right to choose, in the United States of America.

We have an executive branch making determined and deliberate assaults on LGBT+ rights on a scale literally never before seen. The rabble-rousing polemics of the George W. Bush administration, the casual hatred of Reagan: these are nothing compared to the systemic offenses committed by Trump, Pence and their evangelical cronies. The transgender military ban,

the attacks on title IX, the effort to ban the same-sex spouses of diplomats from entering the USA—all a product of Trump's America.

See? You're tired already. You've heard it all, or if you haven't, you're not surprised.

There are worse things than being tired, though.

Actively encouraging this stuff, for example. Those people, though—the ones who still support Trump, the ones who think his plan to end birthright citizenship (and with it the Fourteenth Amendment) is a great idea, the ones who believed the Democrats actually mailed bombs to themselves—those people are lost to any rational appeal. We can't count on them anymore. They've been given the opportunity to regret their decision, to show some basic decency, and they're not going to do it.

And yet, we have among us those who are, to my mind, even worse than the Trumpites. That would be the legions of people standing around wringing their hands and wondering aloud why we can't all get along. The people yelling about “the discourse.” The people who inevitably seem to lecture the left on something called “civility” while utterly ignoring the actual fascists marching in the streets.

These would be that lofty political class known as “the moderates.” I say “lofty” because every single last one of them will tell you, at some length, about their moral superiority to “extremists.” They “don't vote party, they vote for candidates.” They “refuse to condemn someone over something as trivial as politics.” They “remember when there was a spirit of bipartisanship in this country.” And what's more, they will tell you in no uncertain terms why you're what's wrong with this nation, and how it doesn't help to call Nazis what they are, and...I'm making myself sick writing this.

I just don't understand. Twenty or thirty years ago, maybe, I

could see that sort of thinking. Back when the GOP wasn't entirely composed of homophobes and plutocrats. Back when the Democratic Party still nurtured a few nasty Dixiecrat types. Back when neither party much cared about LGBT rights. Back when the GOP still believed in the social safety net. But now?

Now, in this day and age, you're telling me "you vote candidate over party" when the party platform of the GOP is explicitly anti-LGBT? You're telling me that you're sometimes OK with taking away a woman's right to choose? You're telling me that you're sometimes OK with dismantling the entirety of the New Deal and the Great Society? You're telling me that you're sometimes OK with a brutal and xenophobic, to say nothing of racist, immigration policy?

You're *sometimes* OK with the guy who was endorsed by Nazis?

Fuck that. And fuck the calls for "civility" from these very same, amoral people. These people will tie themselves in knots over Mitch McConnell getting his dinner interrupted, but then blithely ignore the fact that he is actively seeking to remove health care from millions upon millions of aged and poor people. They get upset when people shout at Sarah Sanders, but ignore the fact that she lies for, and repeats the lies of, a man who is actively placing children in cages because their parents had the audacity to seek asylum in the United States of America.

When they say "civility" they don't even know what they mean by it. They think they're calling for politeness. They think they're calling for decorum. But you cannot be polite to someone who is actively seeking to disenfranchise, dehumanize or otherwise harm you through the apparatus of the state. You cannot afford common social graces to people who, through their hateful rhetoric, inspire acts of terror against marginalized groups. You cannot extend greater consideration for those who would oppress you than they would extend to you.

Because to do so is to cede power. To do so is to say, “You are deserving of better treatment than I am.” To do so is to prop up the very power structures that are currently aimed at us like weapons, to be complicit in our own ruin.

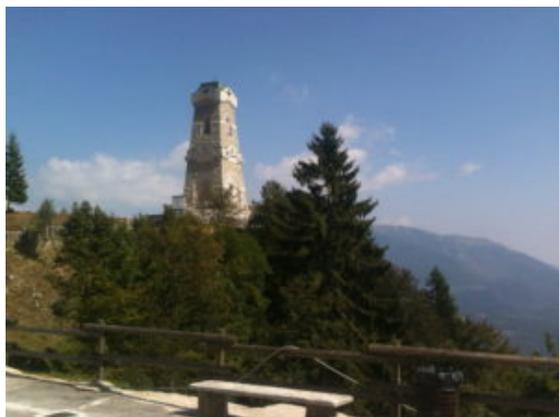
Martin Luther King did not sit down with the leaders of the KKK. Gandhi did not concede that the British Raj “had some ideas worth considering”. And Marsha P. Johnson was not worried about respect, or civility, or decorum when she threw the first brick at the NYPD during the Stonewall riots. She was worried about her survival. Her right to exist. Her right to be a fully recognized human being.

So no, I won't be civil to these fascists. Not now. Not ever. And you shouldn't either.

The Italian Front in WWI: Bad Tactics, Worse Leadership, and Pointless Sacrifice

During this ongoing centenary of the First World War, interest in “The War to End All Wars” has returned, especially in the form of articles and essays. In the English-speaking world, this is almost always focused on the Western Front and the battles featuring Britain or the USA (I contributed to this phenomenon with my essay discussing Robert Graves, [Goodbye to Christmas Truces](#)). The contributions of nations on other fronts are largely forgotten in this context. How many people even know which side Romania or Bulgaria fought on, or where Galicia is? The Italian Front is also largely unknown in the

Anglosphere, except perhaps to note that it is the setting for Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. After reading Mark Thompson's *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front 1915-1919* (Basic Books, 2010), I learned a great deal about this important historical chapter, and strongly recommend this book to all readers of history.



T
h
e
C
h
a
r
n
e

l-house of Pasubio,
towering over the Venetian
plain

I have lived in Italy for 10 years, during which time my passion for history and mountains has served me well. I have hiked up dozens of alpine peaks still crisscrossed with trenches, tunnels, and artillery positions. The World War I front is ubiquitous in northeast Italy, stretching over 400 miles across the Dolomites and Julian Alps from Lake Garda to the Isonzo River in Slovenia. When I was in the U.S. Army I participated in a battalion staff ride to the Asiago plateau north of Vicenza to study the battlefield. As an artillery officer myself I was responsible for researching and giving a presentation to the group about the nature of indirect fire during the war. There are many enormous, Fascist-era war memorials and charnel-houses along the front holding the mortal remains of tens of thousands or more of fallen soldiers. I have visited these monumental tombs at Asiago, Pasubio, Monte Grappa, and Caporetto several times each, and it is always a sobering experience. Every town in Italy

displays a plaque in the public square with the names of those native sons who died in the wars, a dozen or less in the case of the smallest villages. Unlike America, which has not seen war on its own soil since the 1865, the memories of the two world wars live on in a much more profound way in Italy and all the [countries of Europe](#). In Italy's case, the ostensible "victory" of the First World War make it the source of a continuing myth of heroism. Here's the truth: Italy's participation and conduct in that war was a total disaster that led directly to its two decades of Fascist rule, and subsequent defeat in the next world war.

Bad Tactics



A
l
p
i
n
i
,
I
t
a
l

ian mountain
soldiers still
revered today,
climbing up steep
slopes to their
mountain-top
positions

One notable recent exception to the general lack of English-language recognition of the Italian front is this [fantastic journalism](#) by Brian Mockenhaupt in Smithsonian Magazine. In

this article the author mainly discusses the extreme winter hardships of the high mountain fighting in the Dolomites and the feats of engineering by both the Italians and Austrians. Despite repeated offensives, almost all by the Italian side, the front throughout the war stayed remarkably stable in something resembling an even more inept version of the trench warfare of the Western Front. The two main sectors were the high mountainous border between the Trentino and Veneto, especially around the Asiago plateau down to Monte Grappa, and the line of the Isonzo (now Soča) River which nearly aligns with the current border of Italy and Slovenia and is characterized by a plateau called the Carso. The first sector is rightly famous for the unprecedented extremes I mentioned before. Indeed, Mark Thompson says in *The White War*: "The mountain units had to endure fantastically severe conditions. War had never been fought at such heights before, up to 3,500 metres. Fighting in the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and more recently in Kashmir occurred at even greater altitudes, but the soldiers' experience on the Alpine front remains unmatched." As for the feats of engineering, this was probably the single strong point of the Italian war effort from 1915-1918, and one has left traces all over the mountains today from the 52 tunnels carved up into Mt. Pasubio, to the cable cars, *vie ferrate*, trenches, and explosive mining under enemy positions. Otherwise, both sectors of the front still suffered from the same massive errors of strategic and tactical planning and execution that doomed both belligerent sides to such a brutal and dismal struggle.



T
h
e
b
l
u
e
-

reen waters of the Soča
(Isonzo) as it flows
peacefully today through a
verdant valley near Kobarid
(Caporetto)

For anyone who has never been in close proximity to artillery shells landing or machine-guns firing, it is hard to imagine the destruction these modern weapons can cause on unsuspecting or unprepared human beings. Imagine men moving up exposed and difficult terrain into unbreachable barbed wire entanglements, then you will have an idea of the fundamental tactical problem of World War One that led to the stalemate of trench warfare. On the Isonzo Front, the Italians fought 12 large battles along the exact same lines over the course of over two years, involving over a couple million soldiers, a million casualties, and absolutely no change of tactics to face the artillery, machine-guns, and barbed wire. The Austro-Hungarians defended this front extremely well for over two years, very undermanned and under-equipped, giving up very little territory, and inflicting more casualties on their enemy than they received most of the time. In *The White War*, Thompson writes: "The Italians kept coming, wave after wave, across open ground in close-order formation, shoulder to shoulder, against field guns and machine guns. To one Austrian artillery officer, 'it looked like an attempt at mass suicide'. Those who reached the deserted Austrian line met flame-throwers, tear gas, and machine-gun and rifle fire emanating from hollows and outcrops on the crumpled Carso. When dusk fell, their only significant gain was a hilltop, wrested from the Polish infantry of the 16th Division."

The 12th Battle of the Isonzo of October 1917, often called the Battle of Caporetto, was the first and only offensive by the Austrians on this front during the war. It was also a massive and unexpected defeat for the Italians that took back

a part of the territory ceded to Italy in 1866 and nearly succeeded in forcing Italy to sue for a separate peace treaty. Superior German forces participated and led the way in this victory, including a vanguard company led by a young Lieutenant Erwin Rommel whose initiative caught much larger Italian forces unawares and helped break the poorly defended Italian lines west of the Isonzo. Thompson writes: "Caporetto was the outcome when innovative tactics were expertly used against an army that was, in doctrine and organization, one of the most hidebound in Europe. The Twelfth Battle was a Blitzkrieg before the concept existed."

The disaster of Caporetto for the Italians led to the long overdue replacement of the inept Supreme Commander Luigi Cadorna, and the consolidation of Italian forces along a much more compact and well-defended line of the Piave River north of Venice. This allowed the Italians to bide their time and build up forces for one last offensive against the by-then completely exhausted and hopeless Austrians. This last battle, with the auspicious name of Vittorio Veneto, supposedly washed away forever the stain of Caporetto and the Isonzo (which seem to have been traumatically erased from Italian memory immediately after the war).

Even for someone who spent two years in combat and is well-versed in military history, the stupidity and callousness of the Italian generals is enraging. Sending millions of courageous young men into uphill attacks without effective artillery backup, aerial support, intelligence, or even wire-cutters for the barbed wire is a way to earn the absolute contempt of your own soldiers, as well as the enemy, as well as posterity. Thompson described the front in this way: "Italian losses were increased by sheer carelessness, born of inexperience and also ideology. Many officers disdained to organize their defenses properly because they thought the Austrians did not deserve the compliment. Only tragic experience would expunge this prejudice."

And again here: “The troops were unprepared, in every sense, for the conditions they faced. Lacking weapons, ordered to attack barbed wire, struck down by typhoid and cholera, poorly clothed and fed, sleeping on wet hay or mud, the men began to realize that they were ‘going to be massacred, not to fight’. Hardly Garibaldian warriors, rather cannon fodder in a new kind of war.”

On the living conditions at the front that never improved in nearly three years: “Sweat, dust, mud, rain and sun turned the men’s woolen uniforms into something like parchment. Their boots often had cardboard uppers and wooden soles. Lacking better remedies, the men rubbed tallow into their cracked feet. Helmets were in very short supply. The wooden water bottles were unhygienic. The tents – when they had them – leaked. The wire-cutters were almost useless, and unusable under fire: ‘mere garden secateurs’, as a Sardinian officer wrote disgustedly in his diary. Ration parties were often delayed by enemy fire. The only hot meal was in the morning, and so poor that soldiers often rejected most of it. The pervasive stench could, anyway, make eating impossible. The effects of such poor nutrition were evident after three or four days in the trenches, and some units sent out raiding parties for food and clothing in trenches that the enemy had abandoned. The soldiers slept on straw pallets, but there were not enough to go around. Even in the rear, before proper hutments were built, the men lived in tents that quickly became waterlogged and filthy. Abysmal medical care led to ‘a good number of avoidable deaths due to inhuman treatment’. Wounded men were routinely ‘shipped on 20 or 30 km ambulance runs on vile roads and then kept waiting for hours outside hospital’.”

Worse Leadership

How did things get so miserable for the Italian side? The answer is an utter lack of political and military leadership.

The only person of leadership during this war who comes out well in reading *The White War* is General Armando Diaz, who replaced Luigi Cadorna after Caporetto and injected basic competence and caution into the war. I cannot recall in any historical period a supreme commander who combined such unchallenged authority and staying power with such complete incompetence. In any other situation, a leader such as Cadorna would have been quickly killed, replaced, or forced into surrender. The less said about this character, who somehow still has streets named after him in Italy, the better.



L
u
i
g
i
C
a
d
o
r
n

a

I'll leave him with two succinct descriptions from Thompson's book: "Worst of all, Cadorna had discovered a knack for abandoning offensives when Borojević [the very capable Croatian general of the Austrian Isonzo forces] had committed his last reserves. The steely exterior concealed a vacillating spirit."

"Cadorna's and Capello's [another inept general] actions in the Eleventh Battle were so careless and self-destructive that historians have struggled to account for them. In truth, the two men acted fully in character. Cadorna's battle plans always tended to incoherence, his command often slackened fatally in the course of offensives."

The other, more complex side of the leadership vacuum was political. Cadorna was only able to consolidate such unchallenged power for so long because he answered only to the monarch, still a position of great power in Italy at that time. The monarch was a figure known as Vittorio Emmanuele III, the grandson of the first king of unified Italy, and a weak-willed and morally suspect character. This king nevertheless enjoyed a long reign from 1900, when his father Umberto was assassinated, to 1946, when he finally abdicated in a quixotic bid to save the institution of the monarchy for his son and for Italy. Fortunately, Italy voted in a referendum to abolish the monarchy and establish a republic, and finally vindicating the true fathers of Italy, Garibaldi and Mazzini. Victor Emanuel was so short (4'11") that he could not wear a real sword, and so his nickname was "Little Sabre". Italy engaged in at least five foolish wars during his reign, and he was instrumental in allowing Mussolini's Fascist regime to violently take control of the government and hold it for 22 years.



M
u
s
s
o
l
i
n

i and D'Annunzio in 1925: architects of the reactionary "anti-Risorgimento". Mussolini paid the poet a yearly stipend from 1922 to his death in 1938 for not interfering in politics.

Before Mussolini, there was the fascinating and nauseating character of Gabriele D'Annunzio, a Decadent poet, for a long time the most famous person in Italy, and a bloodthirsty proto-Fascist. Thompson spends an early chapter explaining the importance of D'Annunzio in making the blustery rhetorical case for Italy's involvement in a war most Italians did not care about. The poet at least backed up his words with actions, as he was given an army commission and entered himself into many battles on his own authority, seemingly getting a rise out of the abundant bloodshed falling for Italy's sake. This disturbing character does not come out well in Thompson's account, and rightfully so, I think.

The last aspect of failed political leadership that needs mentioning is the shameful way Italy's representatives behaved both before and after the war. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister before and during most of the war, Salandra and Sonnino respectively, ensured that neither its allies nor its enemies respected Italy's shameful conduct. Italy was actually a member of a secret defensive alliance with Germany and Austria before the war. Italy did not support its allies at the outbreak of war because Austria's declaration of war against Serbia was not defensive in nature. The Italians stood on the sidelines for almost the first year of the war, playing both sides to get a better deal for its aggressive territorial claims. Everything about the beginning of World War One was tragically absurd, but Italy ended up being the most unnecessarily and nakedly opportunistic of all the belligerents. It wanted Austria to give up large parts of its territory in Trentino, South Tyrol, and Friuli (including Trieste) in return for Italy's honoring its alliance. When Austria (who was still Italy's historical nemesis despite this dubious alliance) balked, Italy obtained a secret deal with the England and France called the Treaty of London that guaranteed it would get all the territory it wanted after the war. In the end, Italy's disastrous human cost of participation in this war can be placed fully in the hands of

just three people, according to Thompson–Salandra, Sonnino, and D’Annunzio.

Pointless Sacrifice

Italy’s total number killed was 689,000, the total number of wounded was nearly 1,000,000, and prisoners and missing in action was also 600,000. A huge majority of them occurred on the 55-mile Isonzo front, and Italy, almost uniquely in this war, was only fighting one enemy. The total casualties of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were over three times higher than Italy’s, but that includes the much larger front against Russia as well as Serbia and Romania. For further comparison, Italy suffered more casualties during 3 1/2 years along its only front than *both* sides of the entire U.S. Civil War, which was the bloodiest in American history.



T
h
e
W
a
r
M
e
m

orial of Asiago holds the remains of 55,000 soldiers

Again and again, the numbers of men slaughtered in each and every battle was much higher than it should have been given even modest improvements of tactics or basic respect for human life by the officers. At one hilltop near Gorizia, whose importance was only symbolic, Thompson writes: “The conquest of San Michele had cost at least 110,000 Italian casualties over 14 months, including 19,000 dead, on a sector only eight kilometers long.” At one outcropping defended by the Austrians

in the Dolomites, wave after wave of Italians were sent into machine-gun fire and "more than 6000 Italians had died on Col di Lana for precisely nothing." After one of the endless offensives on the Isonzo, Thompson writes of Cadorna: "As for his actual gains on the Carso, they amounted to several villages and a couple kilometers of limestone, won at a cost of 80,000 casualties." In another nameless struggle: "Five regiments were launched against the lone Habsburg battalion on Hill 383. Outnumbered by 15 to 1, the Austrians still inflicted 50% casualties on the attackers before succumbing." All of this bloodshed was obviously mind and soul-numbing, not only to the millions of soldiers who were called up, but also for the entire nation, most of whom did not want or care about this war and did not even know why it was being fought.

After the war, Italian politicians once again played disgraceful diplomacy to the abhorrence of allies and enemies alike. Prime Minister Orlando and Foreign Minister Sonnino made absurd claims to places like Rijeka, the Dalmatian coast, Albania, and even Turkey, in order to justify their sacrifice, apparently forgetting that every other country "sacrificed" at least as much, and that Italy's position on the "winning" side of the war still did not exactly give it the moral high ground. As Thompson writes: "Orlando's and Sonnino's zero-sum strategy in Paris dealt a fatal wound to Italy's liberal system, already battered by the serial assaults of wartime. By stoking the appetite for unattainable demands, they encouraged Italians to despise their victory unless it led to the annexation of a small port on the other side of the Adriatic, with no historic connection to the motherland. Fiume [Rijeka in Croatian] became the first neuralgic point created by the Paris conference. Like the Sudetenland for Hitler's Germany and Transylvania for Hungary, it was a symbol of burning injustice. A sense of jeopardized identity and wounded pride fused with a toponym to produce an explosive compound."

D'Annunzio's thirst for violence and aggressive nationalism

was not quenched at the end of the war, and he laid the blueprint for the next several decades of fascist dictators by seizing the port of Rijeka with a small militia and declaring it an independent Italian Regency. After he declared war on Italy itself the Italian navy placed a well-aimed shell in D'Annunzio's palace, which led to the poet's quick surrender and flight from the city. Furthermore, the combination of a destructive war and the economic hardships it imposed laid the foundation for future political upheaval. "This enduring sense of bitterness, betrayal, and loss was an essential ingredient in the rise of Mussolini and his Blackshirts." Thompson further comments: "For many veterans, Mussolini's myth gave a positive meaning to terrible experience. This is the story of how the Italians began to lose the peace when their laurels were still green."

An outside observer such as Hemingway, barely 19 years old and on the front for only one month, was able to see the war as "the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery." Somewhat incredibly, from my experience and what I've read, the general opinion about the First World War in Italy is either of forgetfulness or buying into the heroic myth-making of the Fascist regime that wrote the history books in Italy for over a generation. Even if that regime is mostly discredited now (pictures of Il Duce still adorn the mantelpieces of at least a few rustic houses around the peninsula—I have even seen it with my own eyes twice!), the history involved before and during the world wars is too tragic to be accepted. The heroism of the Alpini, rugged mountain soldiers, lingers in the national consciousness more than anything else. Thompson comments that, for all the destruction, World War One was Italy's "first true collective national experience", one whose exorbitant cost only led its victims to embrace it even further. It may be that every symbolic "birth of a nation" always only truly comes about through a horrific spasm of violence.

I think this is where the history of one front of one particular war becomes something more universal in the human experience. War is the worst thing humans do. Based on our biological and social development, it is also one of the most complex and psychologically conflicted. The lessons of history always point to the folly of war, but that has rarely stopped opportunistic politicians and greedy businessmen from precipitating the next one, even against the wishes of the majority. In Italy, as Thompson meditates: “The Risorgimento [the national unification movement led by Garibaldi and Mazzini] was libertarian, patriotic, democratic, enlightened, and still unfinished, forever wrestling with its antithetical twin: authoritarian, manipulative, nationalistic, conspiratorial, and aggressive. From 1915-1944, the anti-Risorgimento had the upper hand. Perhaps the two still contend for mastery of Italy’s dark heart.” I would venture to say that in all countries at all times, these two antithetical notions always vie for control of political power, using emotional calls to arms, for the purpose of either the enlightened betterment of all, or the greedy enrichment of a few. We must always heed these two irreconcilable ideas, and always come out on the side that seeks to end whatever war we are in, and oppose the next war.

Republican Reactionaries and the Road to Fascism



The Utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote the following lines in his great work *On Liberty*: “A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are

both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life.” Mill, a Member of Parliament with the Liberal Party, was a proponent of almost unlimited personal and economic freedom—a platform that is actually a traditionally conservative one, and which has some parallels with Libertarianism. The problem with the Republican Party is that has not been fulfilling its role as the party of order and stability for quite some time (let’s say the Eisenhower years, which were really just eight years of very moderate Conservatism sandwiched between four decades of Liberal dominance). It has degenerated into a radical party that wants to conserve nothing except the sundry privileges accumulated to its business allies, at the expense of a majority of its own members and the population at large. Due to the unfortunate fact that America only sustains two political parties, that one of them has become a completely disordered mess is creating huge ramifications for every aspect of public policy and the general welfare. Let us discuss in greater detail the specifics of the problem and some possible solutions.

Disclaimer: I do not consider myself conservative on any issue except regarding the environment, and I am strongly against almost every aspect of the current Republican Party platform. On the other hand, I do not by any means consider myself a supporter of the Democratic Party and I think the stink of political corruption wafts from them almost as much as Republicans. It does happen that I find much more overlap with some Democratic policy positions than their rivals, but for the most part, given the limitations of the aforementioned two-party political system, I believe it imperative that Republican power and control remain as limited as possible at least until its existential crisis abates. I will state my reasons for this below.

Though I am not myself a conservative, I actually want the Republican Party to fix itself and solve many of the problems besetting it; I am not afraid of Conservatism, but I am afraid

of even more political power falling into the hands of a deeply radical and reactionary party that is fighting hard to reject the reality of the modern world and to deny truth, even in its scientific and purely objective forms. Even though it does not hold the office of the President (though within the Executive branch it is likely that a large majority of legal and law enforcement personnel are in fact Conservative), the Republican Party controls the other two-thirds of the Federal Government (both Houses of Congress and the Supreme Court) and [roughly that proportion](#) of state and local governments. My argument is not that it is inherently bad in a democracy that one party should control a majority of political power at any given time. In a true democracy this should be a common enough event and one which can be reversed at any time if said party loses favor with enough citizens. In those cases, the voters oust that party as a referendum on its actual governance. Soon enough, the tables inevitably flip and it happens in reverse.

No, my argument, rather, is two-fold: (1) The way political power is allocated is actually deeply anti-democratic (due to the corrupt process of gerrymandering districts in Congress; the Electoral College for the Presidency; and the unelected, life-serving terms of the Supreme Court); and that (2) the Republican Party is not upholding its role as the conservative party of order and stability, à la Mill, but increasingly committed to tapping into the negative emotional space that bubbles under the surface of society from whence springs fascism and authoritarianism.

Looking again briefly at my first point, both parties are equally to blame for the undemocratic nature of American politics, as are voters themselves for not demanding change (this will be the only time I will cite the common mainstream media canard that "both parties are equal;" they are not, as we will see, except for the not altogether insignificant lengths to which they both go in corruption and cheating to win—it must be said, however, that Republicans are much more

successful in the latter). It is a result of several factors, including pure luck, that the latest beneficiary of the gerrymandering lottery was the Republican Party, which happened to have a good election result in a low-turnout midterm election of 2010, which came directly after the decennial census, and thus gave more redistricting power to that party for the next decade (until the next census, which will again benefit one or the other of the two parties).

Quick note on voter turnout: Obama was elected in 2008 with an overall voter turnout of 57% of the voting-age population, and that is the highest percentage since the 1960s! In the off-year midterm elections the percentage of voting-age population has held steady at around 37% also since the 1960s. Keep in mind that the entire House of Representatives, one third of the Senate, nearly half of state governors, and similarly high numbers of state legislatures are all elected during these midterm years, which means that barely over one third of population ever cares to have a say in creating a representative government when there is not a president on the ballot. Voter apathy and ignorance is a plague on democracy, and the fact that only just over half of citizens bother to cast a vote is beyond shameful. As for the Republicans, it is well-known and readily admitted by them that they benefit from lower voter turnout. To this end, they actively conspire to reduce voter turnout by any means necessary, especially in places with higher populations of minorities, students, and other groups that generally vote for Democrats. A few of their tools in the lowering of voter turnout toolkit include: requiring only certain types of ID for voting wherever possible, limiting the places where people can obtain these IDs, limiting the time of voting to a single Tuesday in November when people are working and which is difficult, especially for poorer people, to take time off work to vote. Election Day should be a national holiday as it is in many other democracies (here is a [petition](#), for example, calling for the President to make Election Day a national holiday),

and at a minimum expanded to an election week so everyone has a convenient opportunity to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

To further illustrate the extent of undemocratic elections and gerrymandering, consider connections between the following facts: Obama was elected twice with over 51% of the national popular vote each time, yet Republicans took control of Congress in 2010 by a huge margin, despite receiving one and a half million less votes than Democrats. Then, Republicans held control of Congress in 2012 despite receiving about half a million less votes than Democrats. That half-a-million-vote deficit somehow earned Republicans 38 more seats in the House of Representatives, and the explanation is gerrymandering. In Pennsylvania, Obama won by 5 percent, but Republicans somehow still won 13 out of 18 House seats; in Ohio, Obama won by 2 percent but Republicans somehow still won 12 out of 16 House seats; in North Carolina, Democrats won 51 percent of the total votes but only 4 out of 13 House seats. It is the same story in many other states and, with a few exceptions, has benefitted mostly Republicans.

The problem is compounded if we consider the highly undemocratic nature of the Senate, in which, for example, a senator from Wyoming represents something like 200,000 people while one from California represents something like 20,000,000 people, and where even a minority of 40 percent of these already unrepresentative senators can block legislation from proceeding. This is just a brief outline of a few of the systemic problems afflicting the increasingly sickly nature of American "democracy," and it is something that highly troubles me. You see, the best guarantee of a continuing free and open society is a well- or at least moderately - functioning democratic apparatus, but some of the trends have been moving away from this, and this is by design of political operators. When democracy breaks down, it has the potential to enter a downward spiral exploited by demagogues and to end up

somewhere no one intended originally: a dictatorship, fascist or otherwise.

For my second point, the Republican Party will receive fully 100 percent of my accusation, which is the following: The Republican Party has abdicated its role as the conservative protector of order and stability in a *de facto*, if not *de jure*, binomial political party equation. The winds of political change and fortune have always blown hither and thither in modern states, with periods of reform or even revolution followed by periods of relatively ordered, if not perfect or universally free, stability and order. I am of the belief that revolution is highly counterproductive unless it happens in a society already ruled by a heavy-handed dictator or where rights are so trampled on or non-existent as to drive the people to desperation (witness the beginnings of the Syrian Civil War, for example). This is not the case in America or in any other Western country. I also believe that, so long as things remain imperfect in our society (which will be for the foreseeable future), the best course of action is incremental but constant reform in order to improve the healthy functioning of all aspects of society for the largest number of people.

Therefore, so long as things are not perfect and there exists no immediate threat of dictatorship, I see no need to fight for the preservation of order and stability that is the *raison d'être* of traditional Conservatism. On the other hand, I very much want the opposing side of the political spectrum to be represented by pragmatic and reasonable persons who clearly embody the case for Conservatism as a bulwark against violent revolution, in the tradition of Burke or some other such theorist following in the wake of *la Terreur*. I understand that there is a certain intellectual case to be made for Conservatism, though I personally find it distasteful to follow its logical consequences, which is that the status quo will not improve and perfect our society, but rather, it will

only hinder and further corrupt it. I also think the nature of Conservatism is itself arbitrary and hypocritical, in that it makes choices about what to conserve and what to do away with; such choices often spring from personal greed and short-term gain. I respectfully decline the intellectual allure of Conservatism, with the key word being "respect". I understand and sympathize with my fellow liberal-minded and progressive reformists of the following quotations: John Stuart Mill, again (I previously wrote on Mill's Utilitarian philosophy [here](#)), who said in a debate with a Conservative MP in 1866, "I did not mean that Conservatives are generally stupid; I meant, that stupid persons are generally Conservative. I believe that to be so obvious and undeniable a fact that I hardly think any honorable gentleman will question it;" Mark Twain, who said, "Conservatism is the blind and fear-filled worship of dead radicals;" Franklin Roosevelt, who said, "A conservative is a man with two perfectly good legs who, however, has never learned to walk forward;" and John Kenneth Galbraith, who said, "The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness." (Quick aside on the last quote: it cannot be denied the influence of the charlatan philosopher of greed and selfishness Ayn Rand on Republicans; the newest Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan, has repeatedly [cited his dogmatic belief](#) in her creed, and he is one of many).

In all of these quotes there is, in my opinion, more than just a grain of truth, but it is perhaps the humorist Twain who said it best (just as the comedians of today are the ones doing the most to expose political hypocrisy and idiocy): Today's Republican Party not only worships dead radicals, the foremost being Ronald Reagan, but its members have become thoroughly radical and reactionary themselves. Radical in the sense that they want to completely upend a system which has been incrementally built up over decades, especially since the New Deal of FDR, by extreme and sweeping measures; and

reactionary in the sense that they want to radically change the system to return to the status quo ante, which basically means to go back to a time when the government was weaker and indifferent to the suffering of huge numbers of citizens, and when industrial barons had a free hand to monopolize and control most of the economy. This is to say, the state of the world directly before Europe's great failed experiment with fascism. The combination of radical reaction is the most dangerous I can think of in a political party, and one which leads to state or corporate fascism (compare these quotes by Mussolini: "Fascism is reaction" and "Fascism should more appropriately be called Corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power.") Here is an abbreviated list of examples of the Republican platform that reveal it as the furthest thing from a conservative party of order and stability, but rather one that has become wholly hypocritical, corrupt, logically inconsistent, radical, reactionary, xenophobic, anti-science, and anti-humanistic:

One: 97 percent of scientists agree, but the Republicans stand alone even among the Conservative parties of other developed countries in rejecting the existence of climate change or completely discounting even the possibility that it has been even partially caused by human activity. A conservative position should be to protect and *conserve* the planet and its people and resources as much as possible, no matter the cause or extent of the problem. Nowhere in the preservation of order and stability is it called for to totally deny reality. This one is easy, but of the utmost importance given the lengths to which Republicans go to protect the outdated fossil fuel economy at the cost of the future inhabitability of our planet.

Two: Through the efforts of past activists and the policies of a few prescient politicians (both Roosevelts, to name two), America built up a large, prosperous middle class that enriched the whole society and ensured relative peace and

prosperity more than had previously been seen. A conservative position would be to maintain the policies that had helped build up and protect the majority of America's workers and society. The Republicans, rather, have long since become economic radicals favoring policies that take from the middle and lower classes to benefit the rich, all under the guise of the now widely-discredited but still spouted ideology of "supply-side economics." At one time, even thoroughly "establishment" Republicans like George H.W. Bush (probably also the last non-reactionary Republican) called out this hoax of a policy as ["voodoo economics"](#), but today the belief is as much an article of faith as any that you will find in the Republican platform. Any number of changes to the tax code advocated by Republicans will all make the fabulously rich even richer at the expense of the now-shrinking middle class and the growing and perpetually undiscussed lower class (which we're told is not supposed to exist in America).

Three: A truly conservative party would seek to protect the individual freedoms that are enshrined in the U.S. Bill of Rights, but on all sides these freedoms are perverted and exploited for corrupt political gains. Freedom of Speech, the most sacred of our rights, has been, in a gross twist of logic, expanded by the Supreme Court to include money itself, in the case of political [donations](#). This, in a very real sense, makes Freedom of Speech not free at all, but very expensive and weighted towards the rich and powerful whose agenda is further enrichment and preservation of an unjust system. A true conservative would want to preserve the sanctity of "one person one vote," even when it goes against her interest, but in reality the radical anti-democratic apparatchiks have enabled money to further corrupt the already (as we have seen) undemocratic system of American politics by allowing unlimited money to flow into endless campaigns by highly vested billionaires. Just as a Wyoming and California Senator are highly unrepresentative by definition, now every politician has become exponentially more unrepresentative,

seeing as they are free to completely ignore the will of most of their natural constituency in favor of a handful of wealthy donors and corporate interests. This is in no way a conservative system. It is one that is on the road to something far worse than merely corrupt democracy: a corporate plutocracy the likes of which have been unseen in this country since before WWII (the most egregious example being the reactionary billionaire Koch brothers, the wealthiest men in America taken together, buying up elections, politicians, think tanks, universities, anything they can get their hands on, in order to achieve complete corporate control over government). Incidentally, as stated earlier, Mussolini would not recognize a meaningful distinction between "corporate plutocracy" and fascism as he understood it.

Four: a conservative party would theoretically continue its protections of individual rights in the case of personal choices that do not come under the purview of the government in any case: personal issues like couples' reproduction rights, everything involving an individual's sexual life, and personal drug use. Counter-intuitively for the party of supposed "liberty" is that Republicans overwhelmingly concentrate their rhetorical (if not legislative) energies on the non-issues of abortion, gay marriage, and a [disastrously counter-productive](#) "Drug War", even while saying at the same time that they do not want the government involved in their lives. It is an improbable twist of logic to say that government should be as small and weak as possible while simultaneously calling for it to mass regulate the most personal and individual choices humans can make in life. For those so-called conservatives opposed to regulating drugs on the basis of its expanding the bureaucracy, the drug war as waged now has the secondary consequence of necessitating a massive police, intelligence, and diplomatic apparatus that rivals counter-terror efforts. This sort of circular logic (we need to fight the drug war to keep bureaucracy small and insurance costs down so we need to spend billions of dollars

on a big bureaucracy to fight the drug war) is characteristic of America's hypocritical, mendacious, small-minded and ill-conceived conservatism.

Five: Republicans never stop insisting that they want "smaller government" (there is an influential power-broker and tireless advocate for tax cuts named Grover Norquist who once [disturbingly said](#) he wanted a government so small that he could "drown it in a bathtub") while at the same time not realizing that the military is one of the biggest and most expensive components of the government. True conservatism would advocate a strict imposition of order and stability, especially regarding foreign policy and the threat of war. In reality, most Republicans are [loudly](#), [stupidly](#), and thoughtlessly in favor of war whenever and wherever possible, disregarding that war itself is the biggest and oldest creator of disorder and instability. To pile on the madness, many of these people are what are known as "[chickenhawks](#)": politicians who always want to demonstrate America's martial prowess, despite never having served in the military and not caring at all for troubled veterans or any drawbacks to endless war-making.

The issue at its heart, like most of these, is not conservatism, but of who profits and benefits. The Republican Party, as much as it talks about social non-issues as mentioned above, is, in fact, wholly owned and controlled by corporate interests, one of the most significant of which is the oft-cited but still very real "military-industrial complex." Former [President Bush](#) and [Vice President Cheney](#) (two infamous chickenhawks, by the way) may have helped their [friends, families, and allies](#) to profit greatly from an illegal war (Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Iraq again), but that does not make them conservative. It just makes them corrupt and immoral.

Six: In the same vein, even if war were necessary (as it very rarely may be), a conservative would want to at least protect

and reward its own combatants. Republicans, however, have without question or reservation paid untold and unknown amounts of taxpayer money into the hands of [private arms producers and contractors](#), but cannot seem to even take care of its own veterans, many of whom are deeply troubled and impoverished, using every opportunity to deny benefits for one reason or another—blaming servicemembers and veterans for creating their own problems is the usual conservative canard. The Department of Defense is by far the [biggest and most expensive](#) war machine in the world, and Republican claims of fiscal conservatism are washed away in a flood of rampant waste, fraud, and abuse that envelops the nearly \$1 Trillion-a-year Defense industry. The Department of Veterans Affairs on the other hand, like many government agencies, has been willfully underfunded by Republican budget scribes in order to create a problem where none existed before (the same fiscal strategy taken with the US Postal Service, as well). The result—for veterans or federal workers or any of the other tens of millions of Americans directly dependent on federal jobs, contracts, or support—is disastrous at an individual level of homeless, injured, unemployed, and suicidal veterans and their families.

Seven: America has long built up, concurrently with its middle class, an enviable education system, including world-class universities, that has benefitted society as a whole, both in America and around the world. Conservatives should ideally want to preserve this seemingly wonderful and unpolitical network of classrooms and laboratories for tomorrow's leaders in every field. Republicans, on the other hand, have fully and unabashedly inflamed and empowered the anti-intellectual potential that exists on the margins of every society from ISIS all the way up to Europe and America. In doing so, the Republicans long been at work behind closed doors, slashing funding for public schools and universities, doing their best to gut political opposition to their platform while empowering the type of lazy satisfaction with stupidity and ignorance

that one always sees in countries beset by dictators. All the while, they have looked the other way while tuitions skyrocketed due to lack of public funding and student debt skyrocketed due to increased tuition, locking whole generations of young people to lifetimes of debt servitude to private lenders. Moreover, they have made education itself into a political battlefield and actively vilified teachers who protested the short-sighted change of focus and funding for schools. This is in keeping with the modern-day know-nothingism of the Republican Party, whose politicians decry science, public education, and academic “elites” at every opportunity even while most of them have themselves attended [Harvard](#) or [Yale](#).

There are numerous other examples to be made (private prisons, unions, roads, trains, infrastructure, oil subsidies, renewable energy, gun violence, systemic racism, minimum wage, unequal pay between the sexes, immigration, agricultural subsidies, free trade, health care, the lobbyist/politician revolving door, post offices, national parks, capital punishment), but I think I have made my point clear for the time being. As I said, I am deeply troubled by the series of events that has led to the current iteration of the Republican Party as it is reported on a daily basis in the (corporate, for-profit) mainstream news. The level of [fear-mongering](#), especially after the Paris attacks, and open racism and calls for violence is so rampant to enable the rise of unquestionably [fascist Republican candidate Donald Trump](#). I will restate that I do not by definition support the Democratic Party for its own sake, or hold them to be innocent of all the charges leveled against the Republicans above, but their moderate level of corruption pales in comparison to the cyclopean walls of corruption and reaction built by the recent Republicans.

The Republican Party has not only shown its [inability to properly govern](#) the country during the Bush administration,

but it is currently showing its inability in the many states where it controls the levers of government to enact its deeply reactionary policies. It is only an undemocratic system which has allowed this in the first place, but it also goes against the desires and economic interests of a huge majority of citizens themselves, both conservative and otherwise. The danger is that further control by this irresponsible and radical group of power-brokers will entrench and further worsen the situation to the point that we will cease to live in even an ostensible democracy, but rather, we will wake up one day in something like a dystopian vision of a technologically, culturally, or politically fascist state. The solution, as always: more interest, engagement, and activism by citizens and voters, and not just once every four years but on a daily and local basis. We get the government we allow.