

# United States - Trump In Power: The First 100 Days

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**President Donald Trump is neither the populist champion of working class underdogs that some of his supporters hoped, nor is he is the fascist dictator that some feared. Coopted by the Republican establishment, he is a dangerous, authoritarian, militarist whose programs threaten the American people, world peace, and the planet.**

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As Trump took office, the majority of Americans were anxious, worried.

Trump's inaugural address did nothing to put their minds at ease. Many were shocked and frightened by his short, strident speech with its allusion to "American carnage" and its dystopian visions of an American populated by "mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge; and the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential." [1] His call to put "America First," using the slogan of the rightwing movement of the early 1940s of which the anti-Semitic aviator Charles Lindberg had been a spokesman, alarmed many. As former President George W. Bush commented, "That was some weird shit." [2]

Trump was popular only among his base. He took office with the worst public approval rating of any president in the history of polling. Only 44 percent of Americans approved Trump during his first month in office compared to 51 percent approval of President Ronald Reagan and for George W.H. Bush, 57 percent for George W. Bush, 58 percent for Bill Clinton, 59 percent for Richard Nixon, 66 percent for Jimmy Carter, 68 percent for Dwight D. Eisenhower, 72 percent for John F. Kennedy, and an astounding 76 percent for Barack Obama. [3]

Trump's abysmal approval rating was not so surprising when one considers that Trump had won only 19.5 percent of votes from all possible voters, with Hillary Clinton winning 19.8 percent, other candidates 2.2 percent, some 29.9 percent not voting, and 28.6 percent ineligible to vote (since they either had not registered or were felons who had lost their voting rights). [4] Trump was so

unpopular that in his first 12 days in office that some 12,000 Twitter messages were recorded that contained the words “assassinate Trump,” presumably either as a speculation, suggestion, or hope.[5] Nevertheless, no matter how unpopular he might be—53 percent disapproved—Trump swore the oath and moved into the White House. Many Americans were apprehensive.

The great fear in the minds of many liberals and people on the left was that Trump would install an authoritarian, reactionary government, or that his administration might provide a springboard to actual fascism. Equally, or perhaps even more worrisome, was the fact that many of the Americans who had voted for Trump did not seem to share these concerns. Among many Americans of all political persuasions was the question of what could be expected from the president who had been such a demagogue, so vitriolic, so prone to encourage violence, so impetuous, and so unpredictable.

Psychologists speculated on his possible mental problems. The most common diagnosis was narcissism, but there were various others as well. Psychologist Dan P. McAdams wrote in *The Atlantic magazine* that,

*“Donald Trump’s basic personality traits suggest a presidency that could be highly combustible. One possible yield is an energetic, activist president who has a less than cordial relationship with the truth. He could be a daring and ruthlessly aggressive decision maker who desperately desires to create the strongest, tallest, shiniest, and most awesome result—and who never thinks twice about the collateral damage he will leave behind. Tough. Bellicose. Threatening. Explosive.”*[6]

A frightening analysis. John Gartner, another psychologist with twenty years experience at Johns Hopkins University, went further circulating a petition signed by 25,000 that read:

*“We, the undersigned mental health professionals believe in our professional judgment that Donald Trump manifests a serious mental illness that renders him psychologically incapable of competently discharging the duties of President of the United States. And we respectfully request he be removed from office, according to article 3 of the 25<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution, which states that the president will be replaced if he is “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office.”*[7]

Others suggested that Trump had had a brain tumor, a stroke, or was in the early stages of dementia or of Alzheimer’s, a heredity disease from which his father had suffered. Whatever the merits of these various analyses and speculations, they demonstrate the great public misgivings with regard to the new president.

There was also a proliferation of articles comparing Trump and his followers to Adolf Hitler and the rise of the Nazis. Intellectuals, the only Americans besides immigrants and military people who know much about other countries, compared Trump to Viktor Orban and the Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary or to Marie Le Pen and the National Front in France. But most Americans, more familiar with Hitler, wondered if Trump might not prove to be a similar authoritarian figure. Readers ransacked libraries and bookstores for histories of Hitler and the Nazis and Facebook pages were filled with discussions of Trump and fascism. Others turned to reading dark, futuristic novels like George Orwell’s 1984 and Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, or to American novels about the rise of fascism in the United States, such as Sinclair Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here* or Philip Roth’s *Plot Against America*, all of which surged in sales in bookstores and on Amazon.

Trump might be crazy and reactionary, but he was also shrewd. On his fourth day in office, Trump met with building trades union leaders who gushed over the new president’s plans for vast infrastructure projects: highways, bridges, and, of course, the border wall. Sean McGarvey, president of the North America’s Building Trades Unions, sounded like Trump himself as he called it “an incredible meeting,” the “best he had ever had in Washington.” “We have a common bond with

the president,” said Garvey. “We come from the same industry. He understands the value of driving development, moving people to the middle class.”[8] Trump would also woo the president of the historically liberal United Auto Workers, though the public employee and service workers unions consistently opposed him. Trump was appealing to the Democrats historic labor base, and finding some allies there.

## **The Resistance Begins**

But many moved into active opposition. The shock of Donald Trump’s election to the presidency in November 2016 detonated the eruption of a new social and political movement that named itself “The Resistance.” Trump’s Islamophobic, racist, and misogynistic campaign and the rightwing, authoritarian populist politics that characterized his first days in office set in motion millions of Americans who raised the cry “Not my president!” Concerned about Trump’s cabinet of billionaires and generals, angered by his plans to end the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), disconcerted by his admiration for the dictator Vladimir Putin, shocked by his offhand insults directed at foreign leaders and governments, and appalled by the Muslim ban, everywhere in America by the tens of thousands people began marching and demonstrating as they have not for two generations.

On January 21, the day after his inauguration, more than 500,000 rallied for the Women’s March in Washington, D.C. to repudiate Trump’s presidency, his vulgar and misogynistic language and behavior, and his anti-woman policies. While Washington, D.C. was the main march, there were some 700 sister marches—some of hundreds of thousands and many of tens of thousands—in cities and towns across the United States. Altogether, an estimated four million marched in what was the largest national protest demonstration in the nation’s history.[9] The women’s protest reawakened a dormant women’s movement.

When at end of his first week in office, late in the afternoon of January 27 Donald Trump issued an executive order on immigrants and refugees, popularly known by his own term as the “Muslim ban.” Thousands from New York City to Seattle went on January 28 to the nation’s major airports to protest the executive order. The demonstrations, initiated by immigrant rights groups through social media, took place not only at major airports, such as John F. Kennedy Airport in New York—where it grew to several thousand—and Los Angeles, but also in smaller cities like Portland OR. Tens of thousands joined the anti-Muslim ban protests on January 28 and 29. A resistance surged up in the streets across the country.

Trump’s first several weeks in office did little to allay the public’s fears. He continued to send out late-night tweets attacking his political opponents, sometimes antagonizing foreign leaders, and frequently making wild, unsubstantiated claims. At the same time he began his political career with bold strokes.

## **A Cabinet of Billionaires and Generals**

Donald Trump had run for president on a nativist, nationalist economic platform, promising to “Make America Great Again” by both encouraging job production and defending those jobs against both foreign capital and foreign workers. Trump promised to rebuild the national infrastructure and to pressure companies to keep jobs in or to return industrial jobs to the United States. He pledged to protect those jobs from Mexicans and other “illegal immigrants” as well as to protect the United States from economic competition from China and from Islamic terrorism. While vowing to protect Social Security and Medicare, he promised to repeal and replace the vilified “Obamacare” with a

“bigger, better” healthcare plan. Finally, Trump swore to end America’s foreign wars and the U.S. policy of regime change in foreign countries, concentrating on putting “America First.” It was this nationalist economic platform that in a few key states had won Trump just enough voters to carry the Electoral College vote and win the election.

In order to carry out his program, Trump had promised to “drain the swamp in Washington,” that is, to eliminate the corruption that resulted from corporate lobbyists and legislators who colluded to put their private interests ahead of those of the American people. During his campaign, Trump railed against Wall Street bankers, often singling out Goldman Sachs, a financial firm close to the Clintons. He vowed to limit congressional terms in office, to forbid former legislators from becoming lobbyists for five years, and to ban foreign lobbyists.[10] With the swamp drained, Trump claimed, his nationalist program would make America great again. As Trump took office in January of 2017, the people wondered: Who would he chose for his leadership team? How would he govern? Would he fulfill his promises? The first clue was the cabinet.

Because he was a maverick and not a politician—the very “outsider” identity that propelled him into office—he had none of the usual political infrastructure of most incoming presidents—no savvy political advisors, no circles of party loyalists, no legislative allies, no strong ties to the military leadership, no trusted friends in the media. This lack of political connections forced him to depend on family and friends like his daughter Ivanka, her husband Jared Kushner, and his recently acquired buddy the radical alt-right journalist Steve Bannnon. With no reliable consigliore and no political entourage, he had to turn to the Republican Party and the Establishment for assistance in choosing his cabinet. They were more than happy to do so.

As Grover Norquist, a conservative leader of Americans for Tax Reform, a group that opposed virtually all taxes, had commented back in 2012:

*“All we have to do is replace Obama. ... We are not auditioning for fearless leader. We don’t need a president to tell us in what direction to go. We know what direction to go. We want the Ryan budget. ... We just need a president to sign this stuff. We don’t need someone to think it up or design it. The leadership now for the modern conservative movement for the next 20 years will be coming out of the House and the Senate.”*[11]

Now in 2017 the Republicans had found that man, whose fingers, however short, were long enough to hold a pen. The populist Trump was being rapidly coopted by the Establishment he had promised to overthrow, but to whom he had upon his election given the keys to the kingdom.

Trump had vowed to end the corruption in Washington, but from his first days as president making his initial cabinet appointments, nearly all easily approved by the Republican majority in Congress, it became clear that, on the contrary, he was repopulating the Washington sloughs with new swamp monsters. Many of Trump’s cabinet members were Wall Street bankers and several were billionaires—the cabinet’s total worth was estimated at \$14 billion—and several appointees were generals, leading his critics to comment that his government looked more like a military junta than a civilian government.

As in all countries, the four key cabinet positions in the United States are Treasury, State, Defense, and Attorney General, and for three of those four posts, Trump chose individuals from the Establishment who represented continuity with past policy, while for one he chose a rightwing racist who represented a throwback to the country’s bigoted past who could be counted on to restrict the voting rights of the black and the poor. For lesser positions, he chose wealthy conservatives, big contributors to the Republican Party and to his own campaign, who were enemies of the welfare state and advocates of the free market.

Though he had as a candidate lashed out against Wall Street and in particular against Goldman Sachs, as president he appointed a slew of Goldman Sachs associates to positions high and low in his cabinet and among his advisors. As Matt Taibbi had written about Goldman Sachs, "...it's everywhere. The world's most powerful investment bank is a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money." [12] Trump placed the great vampire squid at the very pinnacle of his administration, allowing its tentacles to grab hold of the country.

Sachs men were legion. Trump chose Steven Mnuchin, a 17-year veteran of Goldman Sachs, to be his Treasury Secretary, one of the top positions. Stephen Bannon, also a former Goldman Sachs banker, was picked by Trump to be his Chief Strategist, a new title. The sitting President of Goldman Sachs, Gary Cohn, was chosen by Trump to be Director of the National Economic Council, the body that provides the president guidance on economic issues. And Trump selected a Goldman Sachs outside lawyer, Jay Clayton of Sullivan & Cromwell, to be the Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the government agency that polices Wall Street. Clayton's wife is also a Vice President at Goldman Sachs. And there were several other Goldman Sachs bankers working in high government positions as well. [13] Placing Goldman Sachs at the center of the administration, just as former president Bill Clinton and Barack Obama had done, showed that on the most fundamental level—the relationship of the financiers of the capitalist class to the government—things remained unchanged. [14]

For the three other key cabinet positions, Trump chose a corporate CEO, a retired general, and a rightwing politician. Rex Tillerson, the CEO of Exxon Mobil, one of America's largest corporations, became Secretary of State. For the office of Secretary of Defense, Trump chose General James "Mad Dog" Mattis, who had served as the head of Central Command responsible for American military operations in the Middle East, Northeast Africa, and Central Asia. The selection of Mattis was controversial because civilian control of the military has long been considered fundamental to American democracy. [15] The choice of Mattis suggested continuity with the foreign policy of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. The first three key cabinet positions—Treasury, State, and Defense—all represented choices from the Establishment. For the fourth key position, Attorney General, Trump did break with the policies of the fifty years since the civil rights movement by choosing the ultra-conservative, atavistic nativist and racist Jeff Sessions, who is also an opponent of abortion, of LGBT rights and hate crimes laws. [16]

To be Secretary of Commerce, a particularly important top-level position given his campaign promises on foreign trade, Trump appointed Wilbur Ross, a banker and "vulture" investor worth \$2.5 billion who was known as the "king of bankruptcies." Ross specialized in downsizing industrial firms, often reducing the number of employees by half and letting others worry about workers' pensions, while making a profit for himself and other investors. Ross, who had conducted business in dozens of countries over the years, had at times been an advocate of free trade, though now he would have to make good on Trump's promises to put America first and create jobs at home. [17]

National security positions—external and internal—are also, of course, extremely important and throughout American history often headed by civilians. But, unlike his predecessors, Trump filled them all with military men. As his National Security Advisor, Trump first picked retired Lieutenant General Michael T. Flynn, an erratic, belligerent, Islamophobe, but when it became clear that Flynn had lied to Vice-President Mike Pence about contacts with Russian government officials, he was forced to resign after only weeks in office. To replace Flynn, Trump then chose another general Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, a military strategist best known for his role in the First Gulf War. To head Homeland Security, Trump selected yet another military veteran, John F. Kelley, a retired four-star Marine general who had commanded the Multinational Force-West in Iraq. To head the CIA, Trump picked a civilian, a Republican politician, but one with military credentials, Mike Pompeo, a graduate

of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1986 who had served in the First Gulf War. Taken together, Trump's appointment of so much brass suggested a significant militarization of civilian government.

Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon suggested that several other cabinet members had been chosen for their positions in order to carry out the "deconstruction of the administrative state," that is, to destroy the very regulatory or social service agencies they were picked to lead.[18] Rich Perry, a former Republican governor of Texas, America's largest oil producers, was chosen to head the Department of Energy, an agency that he had, in a previous presidential campaign, promised to eliminate altogether. Perry had no academic credentials and little experience that would prepare him for managing 17 national laboratories, overseeing the country's nuclear stockpile, detoxifying Cold War era weapons sites, and furthering nuclear non-proliferation. To head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Trump chose Scott Pruitt, a Republican politician from Oklahoma, also a big oil state, a man who had repeatedly sued the EPA in an attempt to limit and weaken the agency. The appointments of Perry and Pruitt would certainly be good for the oil and coal companies and bad for any attempt at dealing with the environmental crisis.

Trump's cabinet appointments to social welfare agencies were equally horrendous. As Secretary of Urban Development, Trump appointed the archconservative African American Dr. Ben Carson, a man with no experience in urban and housing issues and an opponent of the agency's anti-discrimination laws. Perhaps Trump's most outrageous appointment among these regulatory and social service agencies was his choice to head the Department of Education, the billionaire Betsy DeVos, a former member of the Republican National Committee, and a well known enemy of public education and the teachers unions.[19] For Secretary of Labor, Trump initially chose Andrew Pudzer, the CEO of CKE Restaurants, the parent company of Hardee's and Carl's Jr., an opponent of labor laws and the minimum wage who disparaged the workers at his own company. Pudzer was forced to withdraw his nomination after it was revealed that for several years he had employed an undocumented worker, as well as revelations that his ex-wife had accused him of abusing her. To replace him Trump chose a Latino, Alexander Acosta, a conservative Republican who had served on the National Labor Relations Board and who had worked for the George W. Bush administration as a Justice Department U.S. Attorney.

To head the Office of Management and Budget, Trump picked Mick Mulvaney, a man who had failed to pay over \$15,500 in taxes on his family nanny. He would prove to be a particularly reactionary and mean spirited individual. Defending Trump's proposed budget cuts in after school food programs—a significant part of the diet of many millions of poor children—he said there was no evidence that children who received the food actually performed better in school.

Nepotism in Trump's leadership team imparts a quasi-monarchical character to his administration. Trump appointed his 36-year old son-in-law, Jared Kushner, a real estate mogul with no previous experience in politics or government, to be a senior White House advisor and charged him with a variety of tasks: to manage the Office of American Innovation, to act as a special envoy to negotiate peace in the Middle East, and to serve as the primary contact for diplomats of more than two dozen countries.[20] Trump's daughter and Kushner's wife Ivanka Trump also became a full-time, unpaid White House advisor to her father.[21] Raising his children to those positions also laid the basis for a future Trump political dynasty.

Trump's cabinet of billionaires and generals, the filthy rich and the far right, family and friends is without doubt one of the most reactionary in modern American history. One could foresee corruption scandals that would rival those of the President U.S. Grant's administration or the Warren Harding presidency. But the appointment that most disturbed and frightened many Americans was Trump's choice of his former campaign manager Steve Bannon to be his Chief Strategist. Bannon, an ex-U.S.

Navy officer and former Goldman Sachs banker, was a founder of Breitbart News, a radical alt-right publication identified with European far right organizations and American white power groups. Breitbart not only took white nationalist and nativist positions, it also promoted white supremacists such as Richard Spencer. On a daily basis it fabricated hysterically anti-Muslim, anti-LGBT, and misogynist news reports.[22] Some described Breitbart as crypto fascist.[23]

For a few weeks, Bannon was member of the National Security Council, a terrifying thought to many. The presence of Bannon in the White House and at the right hand of the president created enormous anxiety not only among leftists and liberals, but even among conservatives and in the Establishment. Yet as the Establishment took Trump in hand, things returned to a quite reactionary normal. Bannon was removed from the National Security Council and Congress thwarted Trump's populist program.[24] Trump's late night tweets and his several post-election campaign style rallies continued to offer up to his base his populist program, even as he accommodated to the Republican Establishment. Conservative and alt-right radio hosts and writers too began to suggest that Trump was selling out.

## **The Russian Imbroglio**

During his campaign, Trump had shocked many Americans with his fulsome admiration and praise of the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, well known for imprisoning or murdering his political opponents, for defying international law by seizing Crimea from Ukraine and militarily intervening in eastern Ukraine. Trump even suggested that the United States and Russia might overcome their differences and perhaps become allies.

Then too there was the suspicion, later confirmed by U.S. security agencies, that the Russian government had intervened in the American elections. Many of Trump's associates, such as his former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, had a long history of relations with Russia and meetings with top-level Russian officials.[25] Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, had also a meeting with banker Sergey N. Gorkov, a close associate of Putin. Roger J. Stone Jr., a veteran Republican operative had contact with Guccifer 2.0, an online figure believed to be involved with Russian intelligence. And Carter Page, who had been a foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign, had been involved in wide-ranging business deals in Russia.[26] Trump's National Security Advisor Michael T. Flynn had conversations with Russian officials and then lied about them, leading to an investigation into his sharing of classified information and acceptance of payment from the Russians.[27] Naturally the question arose, had Trump's associates worked with Russia to intervene in the U.S. election? The U.S. Justice Department authorized an FBI investigation into contacts between the Trump team and Russia before the election. The Senate and the House also created committees to investigate the Trump-Russia connections.

Some Democrats were motivated by a desire to prove that Trump and the Republicans, working with the Russians, had stolen the election from Hillary Clinton, but members of both parties, and many ordinary Americans were concerned about what might be interpreted as treasonous behavior that jeopardized American sovereignty. In any case, the Russian imbroglio was not going away.

## **Trump's Strategy and Agenda**

Since Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term in 1933, a new president's "first hundred days" have become an important measure of a new administration. And it was perhaps even more important for a political novice who had campaigned on a populist agenda. Taking office on January



20, Trump's first hundred days would be completed on April 29, and he moved quickly to take action.

pursuing a strategy aimed at fulfilling campaign promises to his overwhelmingly white voter base that he would keep out the Mexicans who threatened their jobs and stop the Muslims who threatened their lives. So, just five days after his inauguration, Trump issued an order to begin immediately the construction of a wall on the Mexican border and to more aggressively find and deport undocumented immigrants, by expanding the definition of criminal immigrants.[28] Just two days later, Trump issued an order that—in the midst of the mass migration of Syrian war refugees—temporarily banned immigration from seven Muslim countries and suspended the immigration of refugees for 120 days. His order also imposed a religious test, allowing Christian refugees from Muslim countries to enter the United States.

Trump's "Muslim ban," as he had originally called it and as it became popularly known, led to the massive protests at airports across the country. The U.S. Federal Appeals Court overturned the ban. As The New York Times reported, "The three-judge panel, suggesting that the ban did not advance national security, said the administration had shown "no evidence" that anyone from the seven nations — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — had committed terrorist acts in the United States." [29] Trump's first major initiative, poorly planned and executed failed completely. Trump went on to issue a second executive order, but the courts overturned it too.

Trump's second major initiative was an attempt to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as Obamacare, a government coordinated and subsidized private insurance and health care program. Paul D. Ryan, the Republican speaker of the House began the push to repeal even before Trump's inauguration and attempted to pass the repeal in March, but he could not get a majority in the House because of desertions of conservatives on the right, who wanted a more thorough-going destruction of Obamacare, and defections of moderates who had come under pressure from their constituents who were concerned about losing their health insurance. Town hall protests had mobilized large numbers and put a lot of pressure on moderate Republican legislators, several of whom refused to vote for repeal.[30] The failure to repeal Obamacare was an even greater defeat for Trump and the Republican Party. Trump made a second attempt at a health care bill, hoping to pass it during his first 100 days, but it too ran into opposition, so at the present it remains stalled in Congress.[31]

The one victory that Trump enjoyed in his first few months in office came with the Senate's confirmation of his nominee to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch, an extremely conservative judge who could be expected to vote to limit gay rights, to uphold restrictions on abortion, to invalidate affirmative action programs, and to reduce the power of labor unions.[32] Gorsuch was groomed for the position by Leonard Leo, the head of the very conservative Federal Society which has played an inordinate role in shaping the Supreme Court and played the leading role in choosing three of its current justices.[33] Evasive about his views during the Senate hearings, Gorsuch was confirmed on a near party-line vote in the Senate with Republicans being joined by three Democrats for a vote of 54 to 45.

## **The Budget and the Tax Plan**

The other major Trump initiative in the first 100 days was a proposed budget that would have to pass Congress as a continuing resolution by April 28. Trump's budget proposal for the fiscal year, would total over \$4 trillion, called for large increases for Defense (up 10 percent), for Homeland Security (up 7 percent), and for Veterans Affairs (up 6 percent) while at the same time cutting the Environmental Protection Agency (down 31 percent), the Agriculture and Labor departments (both



down 21 percent), Justice (down 20 percent)—through cuts to crime victims, for example, though the FBI will see an increase—Health and Human Services (down 16 percent), and Education (down 14 percent).[34] As the *Washington Post* observed:

*“If you’re a poor person in America, President Trump’s budget proposal is not for you. Trump has unveiled a budget that would slash or abolish programs that have provided low-income Americans with help on virtually all fronts, including affordable housing, banking, weatherizing homes, job training, paying home heating oil bills, and obtaining legal counsel in civil matters.”*[35]

The budget also eliminates nineteen small programs whose cost is only \$500 million but many of which are particularly disliked by conservatives, among them: Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Legal Services Corporation, AmeriCorps and the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities.[36] At the moment Trump’s budget seems headed for problems in Congress from both Democrats and the Republican Freedom caucus, raising the possibility of yet another government funding crisis and possibly a government shutdown.

Trump’s proposed tax plan also works to further enrich the wealthiest. Proposed in April, it would, according to The New York Times, “amount to a multitrillion-dollar shift from federal coffers to America’s richest families and their heirs.”[37] The plan would repeal the state tax, cut corporate taxes from 35 to 15 percent, and end a surtax that funds the Affordable Care Act. Like presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush before him, Trump argues that tax cuts will lead to economic expansion that will recoup lost taxes, so that there will be no increase in the deficit. Voodoo economics all over again, and virtually no one believes this. The budget sits in Congress at the moment.

## **Trump Reverses Himself on Nearly Everything**

Candidate Trump had told his followers that he rejected the American foreign policy of military intervention and attempts at regime change, and he specifically promised that he would not become involved in Syria. But when he received news of a chemical weapons attack that killed 72, men, women, children, and infants, as well as sickening dozens of others, Trump ordered a missile attack on the airbase that had supposedly carried out the chemical attack. According to the Pentagon, 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles had been fired at Al Shayrat airfield in Syria, though there was no report on damage or casualties. Three other U.S. airstrikes in Syria in April, which had received less media attention, reportedly killed dozens of civilians.

Democrats, while criticizing the process, “either condoned or did not take issue with the military action”:

*“[Charles] Schumer, the Senate Minority Leader, said on Thursday night that “making sure Assad knows that when he commits such despicable atrocities he will pay a price is the right thing to do,” while House Minority Leader [Nancy] Pelosi said the strike appeared “to be a proportional response” to the chemical weapons attack. Senator Elizabeth Warren said the “Syrian regime must be held accountable,” while Senator Mark Warner said that Assad “could not go unpunished,” and Senator Dick Durbin called it a “measured response.”*[38]

Democratic Party leaders supported Trump’s airstrike, though polls showed that 61 percent of Democrats disapproved of America’s latest belligerent act.[39]

The attack on Syria’s airbase in reprisal for the chemical attack and the aftermath constituted a series of dramatic shifts in Trump’s foreign policy positions. Previously Trump had seen Syria as a de

facto ally in the struggle against the Islamic State (ISIS), but not only had Trump ordered an airstrike in Syria, but a few days later his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, stated that the Assad era is “coming to an end.”[40] Second, Trump would no longer be a friend or Russia, which had condemned the U.S. airstrike as a violation of international law. Russia also denied that Syria had been responsible for the chemical attack and suggested that it had been carried out by the regime’s opponents. Russia also rescinded the agreement to coordinate air operations in Syria to avoid potential U.S.-Russian conflict there. Third, Trump, who had previously condemned the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as obsolete, now hailed it as bulwark in the defense of Europe and the United States and definitely, “not obsolete.”[41]

Trump reversed himself on a host of other issues. After meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, he announced, breaking a campaign promise, that he would not label China a currency manipulator. He also declared that the Export-Import Bank, which he had previously characterized as unnecessary, was now “a very good thing.” *New York Times* reporter Alan Rappeport wrote that, “The shifts confounded many of Mr. Trump’s supporters and suggested that the moderate financiers he brought from Wall Street are eclipsing the White House populist wing led by Stephen K. Bannon, the political strategist who is increasingly being sidelined by the president.”[42] Trump the populist had knuckled under to the Wall Street and Washington establishments.

Trump’s aggressive language with regard to Korea, most recently stating that a “major, major conflict” with Communist North Korea is possible, represents a continuation of longstanding U.S. hostility to North Korea because of its production of nuclear weapons and development of a long range missile to deliver them to targets as far away as America. President George W. Bush had famously called North Korea, together with Iraq and Iran, the “axis of evil” and Obama had warned president-elect Trump that Korea was the number one national security priority. While Trump has adopted a more threatening attitude, accompanied by dispatching naval forces to the region, his policy is not new.

### **What sort of administration is this?**

Trump’s administration has proven to be neither the populist administration that his supporters had hoped for nor the fascist regime that many liberals and leftists feared—which is not to say that we should be unworried about his government’s clear authoritarian tendencies. What seems to have happened, at least in the first 100 days, is that lacking experience and overwhelmed by events, he has been coopted by the Establishment. Guided by these more moderate, but still quite conservative Republicans, Trump has adopted a foreign policy more in line with those of previous administrations, the Bushes, Clinton, and Obama. If more assertive, as demonstrated by the strike on the Syrian airbase and the dropping of the jumbo bomb on an ISIS site in Afghanistan, his policies are based on the same underlying view of America’s role as the “indispensable nation,” as Bill Clinton’s Secretary of State had put it.

Similarly Trump’s domestic policy, despite his populist appeal, also continues the harder Republican version of the austerity budgets of both political parties over the last few decades. We do not face at the moment an iron fist, though we can expect the state’s gloved hand to push down continuously on those below. Most to be feared is Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ combination of law and order and an attack on the voting rights of the Black and the poor as Trump’s secretaries of regulatory and social welfare departments oversee their withering away.

## The Resistance Grows

People recognize the dangerousness of the Trump administration. The Resistance that had begun the day after Trump's inauguration continued throughout the first hundred days as various groups engaged in street protests or in putting political pressure on their representatives.

**\*Day without an Immigrant** - On February 16, thousands of immigrants in cities across the country took the day off work to protest President Trump's policies on immigration and refugees. Some employers, either because they are immigrants themselves or because they are sympathetic to the immigrant cause, shut their businesses so that their workers could participate. In other cases immigrant workers simply didn't show up for work in what was in effect an immigrant worker strike, and at least 100 workers in different cities were fired for their participation. In some cities, such as Milwaukee, the Day without Immigrants involved mass demonstrations of thousands of immigrants and their supporters who marched to protest Trump's policies.

**\*Not My President Day** - Less than a week later, thousands of protestors in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and some two dozen other cities marched in opposition to President Donald Trump and his policies on what is usually called "President's Day" (Monday, February 20), though this year this occasion was marked by many as Not-My-President Day. On what was in the Midwest and the East a beautiful spring-like day—thanks to climate change and global warming—protestors marched to protest Trump's environmental and immigration policies and just about everything else that the new president stands for.

**\*Town Hall Protests** - Thousands of people also showed up at town hall meetings across the United States later in February to challenge Republican congressional representatives and senators. Angry voters rose to demand that the health care plan's fundamental features be preserved, that immigrants' rights be respected, and that the Environmental Protection Agency be funded. Nothing like this has taken place at local town hall gatherings since the rightwing Tea Party's demonstrations in 2009 and 2010, protests that provided the model for the current left-of-center protests.

Many of the protests were coordinated through an anti-Trump movement linked to the Democratic Party called "Indivisible" that claims 7,000 affiliated groups throughout the country. The group takes its name from the recently published handbook titled: "Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda" written by former congressional staffers, Leah Greenberg and Angel Padilla. In New York, the Working Families Party, which supports progressive Democratic Party candidates, has also been involved in organizing protests. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has also provided resources.

While they overlapped politically with earlier protests such as the Women's March, the immigrant rights protests at the airports, and the Day with Immigrants demonstrations, the town hall demonstrations represented a different cut of the population. Senior citizens and the middle aged were often present in large numbers, though those in their twenties and thirties who have formed the majority of the street demonstrations also turned out in significant numbers in many locations. Led largely by Democratic Party-related organizations, the militant town hall protests often had more moderate politics than the crowds in the streets over the past month. Still one saw in the town halls signs for "Single-Payer Health Care" and "No Muslim Ban" and in some cities heard from the floor not only anti-corporate speeches, but occasionally anti-capitalist ones as well. In February, with the emphasis on Town Hall meetings, the Democratic Party appeared to be taking leadership of the Resistance, the name given to all forms of opposition to Trump.

**\*Anti-War Protests** - After Trump bombed Syria, there were a number of anti-war protests in major

cities around the country, but the protestors numbered only in the hundreds, and the organizers from groups like ANSWER were supporters of Assad, Russia and Iran. Quite unlike the mass protests of women, immigrants, and the town hall rallies, the anti-war demonstrations with their sectarian leadership lacked a genuinely popular character. The anti-war movement that was needed, one that could oppose U.S. imperialism, but also Putin and Assad, had yet to appear.

**\*March for Science** - Tens of thousands, many of them scientists, joined the March for Science on Earth Day, April 22, in cities across the United States and around the world. There were some 400 marches in the US with crowds estimated at 20,000 in New York and Los Angeles, some 15,000 gathered on the Washington Mall, and 10,000 in several cities. Other marches took place in hundreds of other cities around the world from London to Tokyo.

The march was largely motivated by President Donald Trump's proposed budget that would cut funding for many science programs, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is being cut by 31 percent. Marchers in Washington carried signs reading, "Save the EPA." and "Save the NIH" The NIH is the National Institutes of Health, which is also being cut by 18.3% or \$5.8 billion. Other marchers in various cities carried signs reading, "There Is No Planet B," and "Make Science Great Again" among many others.

The march was sponsored by a variety of scientific organizations among them the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Geophysical Union, the American Chemical Society, and the Paleontology Society. Public health physicians, nurses, and other health workers participated in significant numbers. Many of the scientists marched with their families in spring rains on the East Coast.

Originally organized through the social media site Reddit and then through a Facebook event site, within a week the supporters grew from 200 to 300,000. Popular educator Bill Nye "the science guy," Mona Hanna-Attisha, pediatrician and the key whistleblower in the Flint Water Crisis, and Lydia Villa-Komaroff, a cellular biologist and among the first Mexican-American women in the United States to receive a doctorate in the sciences served as the public faces of the March.

While not so central to the leadership of the March for Science as they have been in other protests, in several cities Democratic Party politicians spoke at the rallies. In Los Angeles, Democratic Congressman Brad Sherman told marchers there, "Not since Galileo was condemned by the Inquisition have science-deniers had such powerful friends."

In San Francisco, however, no politicians were permitted to speak. "Science is nonpartisan. That's the reason that we respect it, because it aims to reduce bias. That's why we have the scientific method. We felt very strongly that having politicians involved would skew that in some way," Caroline Weinberg, a public health researcher and co-organizer of the march, said at the National Press Club earlier this month.

### **The Need for a Politically Independent Movement**

While opposition to the Trump administration has spread throughout the society and now involves many social groups, the movement does not have a clear and independent political position. The Democratic Party, still thoroughly corporate, neoliberal, and therefore unreliable—as demonstrated for example in its failure to support single-payer health care or Medicare for all—has taken the lead in the organization of much of the Resistance, and especially in its more political expressions. If the Resistance is to be successful not only in stopping Trump and the Republican Party, but also in fighting the corporate Democrats, and more important the capitalist system, we will need to build a

movement that creates its own political identity, even if we have no political party of our own.

**Dan La Botz**, April 30, 2017

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**P.S.**

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