ANTIFA, Red Herrings and Fanning the Flames of Discord!

It should come as no surprise that there are many Red Herrings flying in the run up to the US presidential elections. Watching the spectrum of news outlets will bring an observer to completely different conclusions about any subject, especially political, and leave them feeling the news outlets are actually talking about themselves, not their ostensible subjects.

What escapes critical attention is why all this attention is being paid now to what is being labelled a great threat to the American way of life - Antifa, which is proving more an ideology than a group, even in the accounts of the FBI.

FBI Director Christopher Wray recently said that the bureau views Antifa as "more of an ideology than an organization," undercutting statements by President Donald Trump and others in his administration that Antifa is leading, organising and funding acts of violence in cities across the country from a national level.

At first impression, it makes Antifa sound pretty serious when the Trump administration declares, as it did back in May, that the United States will be designating Antifa a terrorist organisation. It makes you wonder what evil forces must be lurking in the shadows it casts, perhaps all part of a plan to topple the US or some foreign conspiracy to destroy American democracy.

But the Trump administration failed to mention who exactly Antifa are - the personalities involved, its structure, how it is actually co-ordination nationwide acts of violence. This begs the question: where does free speech end and where do labels begin, in order for some group to be designated a terrorist organisation?

With a few turns of the shovel, it does not take long to conclude that so called right-wingers don’t understand anything, as Antifa has no power. The media spin about it is more a diversion than anything of substance, a proverbial Red Herring, and sooner or later more may be revealed.

Hopefully before it is too late!

The allegations and evidence don’t match the reality, at least as documented in court papers. Those individuals involved in violent acts, at least those arrested under Federal charges, have not been shown to be linked with any organised anti-fascists groups.

Antifa is short for “anti-fascist,” and as a group it stands in opposition to an authoritarian, right-wing government such as came to power in Germany with the Nazis. The US fought against the Nazis, and Mussolini, even though it singularly failed to act against useful right-wing authoritarians such as Franco and Stroessner. Therefore Antifa should not exist in the US, as mainstream American political culture should reflect the same ideology.

But look at the streets of the USA. We see scenes similar to those in the Weimar Republic in the run-up to the Nazi regime coming to power. Some social media supporters, who also are Trump supporters, known as “Diamond & Silk,” describe how Antifa activists have threatened to murder President Trump, and compare this catch-all organisation to the KKK, apparently unconscious of the irony of this given Trump’s open support for certain KKK activists.

Under the circumstances currently unfolding, with never ending protests over the BLM response and the endemic problem of police brutality in America, it can do not good to designate any group as “terrorist” because it doesn’t agree with you, rather than because it is doing anything. Senior Justice Department officials have publicly warned
against such a designation, but such warnings seem not to have been taken seriously by Trump and his supporters. Now rumors are spreading that Antifa started some of the forest fires in the Western United States. These allegations remain without proof, but you name it, Antifa is allegedly involved. Antifa has become a modern day Black Panthers Organisation, the bogeyman for the convenience of the establishment.

In reality, however, lone wolves, white supremacists and other anarchists from “respectable” suburban backgrounds are more likely to turn to lethal methods to get their point across. As the LA Times has reported, at one point the state of Oregon was inundated with false rumours that Antifa would attack small towns, “Consequently,” said University of Oregon political scientist Joseph Lowndes, “100 guys show up with ARs and pistols and everything else to protect the town from an Antifa that never shows up, because it’s not an actual thing.”

Lowndes should know, as he and another researcher have written a book about Race and Class in the Age of Trump, and has documented the changing politics of race and class across a broad range of phenomena, showing how new forms of racialisation work to alter the economic protections of whiteness while promoting some conservatives of colour as models of the neoliberal regime. All the hype around Antifa serves a purpose, one we need to understand, and the sooner the better.

It is easier to blame popular protest movements like BLM and Antifa, and “left-wing activists” in general, even for the fires consuming the western part of the state, said Lowndes. However, when you read up on these organisations you will quickly understand they are getting the blame for much more than they are responsible for, and this is serving a purpose for the blamers.

As Lowndes and his co-author notes, the real causes of the fires are complex, and rooted in climate change. However, “The irrational conspiracy theory is easier and more appealing to believe,” and it fits the proverbial blame game better, as the current administration is not to be held accountable for the protests across the US, or climate change, as according to Trump and his science-bashing minions it is all hype.

Method in Madness

It is not difficult to understand the benefits of fanning the flames, and how playing two ends against the middle can have political payoff, at least in the mind of Trump. It is fast becoming obvious that “President Trump is responsible for the combustible racial climate that he continues to fuel with one inflammatory tweet after another.”

In the weeks leading up to the US elections, we will likely be hearing more frequent allegations, finger pointing and recriminations as to who is to blame for all the social unrest. But blaming one group after another, as other divisive politicians such as Margaret Thatcher have found, will only give people the impression that a large chunk of the population opposes the regime, because anyone could be labelled a potential member of one of these groups at any time.

There needs to be one enemy, whose members most middle-class and aspirant Americans wouldn’t want to know. Antifa can be made to fulfil that function better than, say, BLM, precisely because it doesn’t really exist, and can therefore be presented a sad mysteriously run and controlled subversive group.

There is no “Antifa” organisation. There is no single leader, there is no network. It is just a label of convenience anyone who is opposed to fascism, and protests against it (or in some cases commits violence) uses.

“Antifa” is a wide range of people with different views but a shared distaste for the fascism they see as being manifested by the current administration. They don’t know what they want to see in its place or how to go about getting it, and therefore couldn’t unite in one movement if they wanted to, any more than people who don’t like rap music can’t coalesce to ban it from the airwaves.

Fell harder than he was pushed!

Perhaps one of the most over the top tweets which can be attributed to Trump is one in which he suggests that an elderly man who was hospitalised after being shoved to the ground by police in Buffalo, New York a few months ago was an “Antifa provocateur” who may have been trying to “set up” law enforcement, and he “fell harder than he was pushed.”

The shocking scene of a policeman pushing an elderly man is indeed hard to believe with the naked eye, and could therefore have been a staged event. But even if it were, it makes no difference.
The man fell backwards and started bleeding from his head and ear. The police just left him on the ground, and only at the insistence of a reporter did he receive medical care. Even if the event was set up, it exposed the police for what they were, as it is highly unlikely that this elderly man was the only victim of such behaviour.

It is unfortunate that the 2020 presidential election is like no other in recent years, not only in terms of the purported choices offered by the two main political parties, (no real choice between them) but that the issues are being watered down to “gut level” feelings about things which should not be issues in any developed democracy. Next week we may well hear the Trump is accusing the Democrats of regulating sunshine out of existence, and the Democrats are accusing Trump of inventing Hell.

**Time is running out!**

Before it is over, some group may be blamed for COVID-19, as there are no holds barred in this election. It has been demonstrated that Trump has deliberately chosen to describe it as the “Chinese virus” by changing the wording in briefing papers written for him. Claiming that Antifa is being run by the Chinese would be a logical next step, and once again further his new friendship with, or rather slavery to, the far more intelligent and capable Kim Jong-un.

Hopefully voters will wake up and focus on the issues and less on the rhetoric, as change is needed. They need to consider what kind of president they want, and how to deal with ethnic and race relations in times of COVID and economic turmoil in order to preserve the fabric of their country.

Unfortunately, the 2020 election won’t help resolve any of these issues. The “established politics” represented by Biden is the past, and even if people hate Trump, his populism has changed the rules. There would never have been a Trump if the past had not been discredited, but no one is offering a new future in which progressive thinking generates a link with the population, rather than enriching the egos and intellects of a few.

The world is sitting on the sidelines and laughing at the US, but “deep down” all know “as goes the US, so goes the world.” The West has no choice but to look to the US for leadership because it is configured that way, just as the Roman Catholic Church would be greatly harmed if it had many brilliant men amongst it, but an incompetent and immoral Pope.

Much of the problem is not the Manchurian Candidates themselves but how the media and political parties are leading the discussion of the issues, often focusing on non-issues than the real ones. But the real issue is the void of leadership and thinking, and that is too scary for anyone in the US to stomach, so it will not be mentioned in its news media.

People’s minds are programmed to think too literally. As a result, they often miss subtle nuances staring them in the face. Imagine the US presidential elections in six weeks - contested results due to postal delays, and buttressed up to a Supreme Court vacany with at least one controversial appointment as a preelection ringer (if the Republican controlled Senate pulls it off in time), amid a pandemic and wildfires... I don't recall any TV show or movie, with such a complicated script. do you?

I can't decide if it's a drama, comedy, tele-novella, or horror series. By saying the current election is equivalent to the Manchurian Candidate, one might be inclined to think current events must line up exactly like the film, or characters have to act the exact same way. That is why it's best to watch both films back-to-back (1962, 2014). It breaks the thread of literalism. You can see how it's the same story with similar results even after characters, the timeline, etc, are all shaken up and elements are switched around.

If nothing changes no matter who is elected, the US will have to convince the rest of the world that this is merely because it is being undermined by Antifa or some other bogeyman. When all these phony political wars - the “War on Terrorism”, the “War on Drugs” were invented, its allies bought that argument. But they don't anymore, and that is why Antifa will be around whatever the outcome of the US election – it is far more useful to the other side than it will ever be to itself.

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