

The Never Trumpers

*Never Trump:
The Revolt of the Conservative Elites*
Robert P Saldin and Steven M Teles
Oxford University Press, 2020, £21.99 (h/b)

*Trumpocalypse:
Restoring American Democracy*
David Frum
New York: Harper, 2020, \$28.99 (h/b)

*Gaslighting America:
Why We Love It When Trump Lies to Us*
Amanda Carpenter
New York: HarperCollins (Broadside Books), 2018, \$26.99 (h/b)

*Running Against The Devil:
A Plot to Save America From Trump – and the Democrats from
Themselves*
Rick Wilson
New York: Crown Forum, 2018, \$28.00 (p/b)

John Newsinger

When Donald Trump first made clear that he was running for the Republican Presidential nomination, the response from the Republican establishment was derision, scorn and dismissal. As it became clear that he was successfully mobilising much of the party's rank and file behind his campaign, panic began to set in – although it was tempered by the confident belief that, even if he did win the nomination, he would never beat Hillary Clinton. Even so, many leading Republicans, especially those involved in the areas of foreign policy and national security, determined to do their best to stop Trump even if it meant a Clinton victory. Trump was just too dangerous to be allowed into the Oval office. As far as they were concerned, after four more years of a Democrat in the White House, the party would recover, the overt racists and white supremacists, neo-Nazis and alt-rightists, isolationists and protectionists, xenophobes and nationalists could all be put back in the bottle and the whole terrible experience could be put behind them. Instead Trump became President, despite losing the popular vote quite decisively, installed in office by the

Electoral College. For the Republican establishment, this posed a serious problem. Did they continue to oppose Trump, did they work with and inside his administration in order to try and contain the man, or did they accept that the Republican Party had changed forever so they better had as well?

The first of the four books reviewed here is an academic study of the so-called 'Never Trumpers', those Republicans who actually opposed Trump in the 2016 Presidential election campaign and, with whatever qualifications, continued their opposition once he was installed in power. The other three volumes are personal accounts by committed Republicans for whom the Trump Presidency has been an absolutely traumatic experience, chronicling how they have responded to the enormity of its excesses and warning of the danger that a Trump second term will pose for the United States.

Never Trump

According to Robert Saldin and Steven Teles, so much of the Republican Establishment, 'the professionals, public intellectuals, political operatives', declared against Trump that, in effect, his administration had 'to govern without most of the party's brain, leading it to make profound errors of basic domestic and foreign policy governance'. This helped create the 'impression that Trump is overseeing a never-ending sequence of incompetence, corruption and political self-subversion'. (p. 4) One can, of course, legitimately question whether this was just an 'impression'. While those Republicans who held elected office were forced to come to terms with Trump, indeed to sing his praises, endorse his lies, cover up his criminality, grovel to the man in the most demeaning fashion, those not dependent on the party's rank and file often became increasingly hostile. Saldin and Teles start off by looking at the backbone of the opposition within the Republican Establishment: the foreign policy and national security veterans and experts.

The Republican 'foreign policy establishment' regarded the prospect of a Trump Presidency with horror. (p. 15) The man was unstable, profoundly ignorant, ineducable – a serious threat to US interests throughout the world just because of his character flaws, leaving aside his xenophobic nationalism. According to Eliot Cohen, one of the leading 'Never Trumpers', Trump was likely 'the manifestation of deep pathologies in the body politic'. He was certainly a threat to 'the two-generation-old American foreign policy consensus'. (p. 18) The Republican foreign policy establishment was by and large bipartisan in sympathy, looking as far as possible to achieve consensus with their Democrat opposite numbers. As

Saldin and Teles point out, they sometimes overlapped. Mike Green, for example, had been offered jobs by both George W Bush and Al Gore before the 2000 Presidential election, while Eliot Cohen, 'Condoleezza Rice's top aide at the State Department', had voted for the Democrat, John Kerry, in 2004. (pp. 31-32) Now once Trump won the nomination, they became 'the purest strain of Never Trumpism'. (p. 35) Saldin and Teles enumerate their objections to a Trump Presidency:

'He praised dictators like Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un. He expressed admiration for brutal authoritarian crackdowns in North Korea and Tiananmen Square. He accused George W Bush of the treasonous offense of deliberately lying the country into the Iraq War. He habitually lied about his own position on the Iraq War. He was dismissive of key post-World War II alliances and international organizations. He was hostile to free trade. He displayed a fondness for torture and pledged to use it more aggressively. He had a reckless attitude about nuclear weapons.' (p. 36)

And so on. Philip Zelikow, another former State Department official, said they would be better off picking a President at random from the phone book.

To try and block Trump, the Republican foreign policy establishment published a number of letters condemning the man, his character and his policies – or rather his prejudices. The two most important were in March 2016 and in August 2016. This was an unprecedented intervention that would in normal times have condemned a candidate to defeat, but these were not normal times. Moreover, our authors tellingly quote Maureen O'Dowd to the effect of how ironic it was for the people who had taken the US into the Iraq War to criticise Trump for being a risk to the country. These were, she pointed out, the very people responsible for 'the worst foreign policy disaster in American history'. (p. 63) This must, at least in part, account for the failure of their interventions against Trump.

Saldin and Teles go on to look at what they describe as the Republican Party's 'political operatives'. These people signed up with just about every contender for the Republican nomination except Trump. Indeed, as far as they were concerned, those people who went to work for the Trump campaign were 'a ridiculous band of degenerates and professional failures, untouchables who couldn't find work in respectable Republican circles'. Many of these 'untouchables' were to actually quit during the course of Trump's campaign because – surprise, surprise – 'they never got paid'. As far as the party's political operatives were concerned, the Trump campaign was 'just a publicity stunt', not to be

taken seriously. (pp. 90-91) When he actually won the nomination, some of them mounted a desperate effort to find a candidate to run against both Trump and Clinton, what they call 'The Kamikaze Mission'. These conspirators looked at Condoleezza Rice, James Mattis, Mitt Romney, John McCain, Colin Powell and others. One of their potential candidates, David French, 'a National Review writer, lawyer, decorated Iraq veteran and devout Christian', pulled out after he was sent pictures of his daughter 'photoshopped into a gas chamber'. (pp. 111, 182) Most Republican operatives, however, including the likes of Sean Spicer and Reince Priebus, made their peace with Trump. The Never Trumpers were inevitably dismayed by how many of their fellow operatives, including people they considered friends, rallied to a man they privately acknowledged to be an ignorant, dishonest crook, a racist and bigot, an unstable incompetent, someone who should never have been allowed to become President. But what the hell!

One issue that our authors highlight is racism. Many of the Never Trumpers had been involved in countering accusations that the Republican Party was racist. They

' . . . had invested a large amount of energy trying to detoxify the party's brand, to highlight the GOP's universal principles, and to bring the party's inclusive message to a wider audience. But the enthusiastic response that Trump's cruelty, racism, and misogyny generated in a large part of the party's base lent support to charges that those inclinations were in fact baked into the party's DNA.' (p. 128)

This seems to have been a traumatic experience for some Republican 'operatives', with Jews represented disproportionately, alarmed by the nature of the forces that Trump was enabling, was giving space to. They were obviously particularly aware of the threat posed by the neo-Nazis and others whose support Trump was quite happy to accept. (pp. 177-184) David Frum, a leading Never Trumper and himself Jewish, was actually approached by another political operative who was rallying to Trump and pointed out to him that Trump was taking up many of the issues that Frum had for years been urging the Republican Party to take onboard, 'immigration . . . middle class incomes . . . drugs'. Saldin and Teles quote Frum's telling reply:

'Yeah, but the reason I've been talking about those things . . . is that I sensed something like Donald Trump was coming, and I wanted to stop him. These concerns are not reasons to empower him. The nightmare has shown up, and I'm not going to be reconciled to it

because the nightmare is using the issues that I warned were bringing the nightmare into existence.’ (p. 160)

This brings us quite handily to David Frum’s new book.

Trumpocalypse

This book must not be confused with the 2018 publication, *Trumpocalypse: The End Times President, A Battle Against the Globalist Elite And The Countdown To Armageddon* by Paul McGuire and Troy Anderson. Whereas Frum is fearful of the Trumpocalypse, McGuire and Anderson positively welcome it as the Christian revolution that Trump is apparently spearheading, presaging as it does the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Their volume is worth noticing if only for demonstrating how wholly compromised the American Christian Right is and how dangerously irrational and conspiracy theory-based their ‘thinking’ is.¹ But what of David Frum?

This is his second book on Trump, the sequel to his *Trumpocracy* (reviewed in *Lobster* 77²). But who is David Frum? He is a long-standing US conservative publicist and writer, who was one of George W Bush’s speechwriters, the author of the strongly pro-Bush memoir, *The Right Man: An Inside Account of the Surprise Presidency of George W Bush* (2003). Frum was a strong supporter of the War on Terror and of the Iraq War, credited with coining the ‘Axis of Evil’ catchphrase, and he co-authored (with Richard Perle) a polemical volume, *An End To Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (2003). Now looking back from the Trump era, he acknowledges that the fact is that in the 21st century, American conservatism ‘has delivered much more harm than good, from the Iraq War to the financial crisis to the Trump presidency’. (p. 6) Frum admits that Nixon, Reagan and both the Bushes ‘may sometimes have drawn power from deep and dark energies in the American soul’, but they were

¹ Paul McGuire and Troy Anderson, *Trumpocalypse: The End-Times President, A Battle Against The Globalist Elite And The Countdown To Armageddon* (Faith Words 2018). They see the Christian Right’s support for Trump through the ‘pussy-grabbing’ affair as a sign of ‘biblical maturity’. (p. 137) They believe, really believe, that ‘despite his imperfections . . . God has raised up Trump to fight the globalist elites . . . We need to stand with and pray for our president’ in what are the End Times. (p. 23) And all this is proven by means of Biblical prophecy and off-the-wall conspiracy theories. My personal favourite is the description of the John Lennon song, ‘Imagine’, as having ‘done much to brainwash several generations into believing that an atheistic global government would be a utopian paradise. This song has played an instrumental role in the world’s embrace of globalism’. And, of course, as we all know the Beatles were only ‘only catapulted to international stardom . . . via a secret Tavistock Institute mind-control program designed to weaken and eventually destroy Christianity’. (pp. 256-257)

² <<https://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster77/lob77-republican-party-end.pdf>>

also concerned to contain those energies. Trump, however, positively 'conjured the dark energies that his predecessors had sought to contain'. Indeed, he was at one with them; he actually shared the bigotry and the prejudices that he was exploiting. (p. 62) Further, Frum is worried that even if Trump loses in November, he will continue to 'rave and rage on Twitter and TV' and 'will sabotage anyone who tries to lead the Republican Party in a more hygienic post-Trump direction'. The real danger is that the 'brutal style of politics' that Trump and his accomplices have introduced will persist and sometime in the future will be applied 'by a politician with a stronger work ethic, sharper intellect and fewer personality complexes' than Trump. (p. 16) Frum actually discusses whether or not Trump and his MAGA movement is fascist, concluding that 'Trump and his ilk are fascoid – near it, but not quite the same, a failure even as fascists'. (p. 69) A much more accurate characterisation would be to recognise that Trump is a profoundly ignorant and wholly incompetent would-be celebrity authoritarian who actively encourages the Far Right and welcomes its support. This, of course, leaves open the question of what might be coming down the road later, led by a leader with 'a stronger work ethic' and so on.

As far as Frum is concerned, Trump is, in reality, only a 'small-scale hustler'. His Presidency is undoubtedly riddled with corruption, cronyism and nepotism, is a third-rate kleptocracy, committed to government of, by and for the Trumps. Between his inauguration and April 2019, 'at least \$4.7 million of Republican Party funds flowed to his clubs, hotels and resorts'. To this we can add the millions 'from lobbyists and foreign governments eager to ingratiate themselves with a sleazy administration'. But as he sarcastically observes, the millions of dollars that Trump is scamming is probably less 'than Michelle Obama earned from her book and speaking fees'. (p. 26)

Even so, how has he got away with such open transparent corruption and nepotism? Frum is really scathing about the inadequacies of the Mueller investigation which he characterises as operating with one if not both hands tied behind its back. As he writes: 'All those reports that Trump relied on Russian funds for his post-2006 golf-course-buying spree. The Mueller team either did not look into them or did not report on them'. (p. 33) Mueller ruled whole areas of Trump's relations with Russia out of bounds, as not relevant, even as Trump was desperately trying to conceal and deny the relationships.

And then there is Fox News. The role of Fox News in enabling Trump is particularly relevant in Britain today as it seems almost certain that the

Johnson-Cummings government intends to defund the BBC if it can get away with it and to bring in Fox News-style TV. This will certainly be necessary if they are to succeed with the massive attack on living standards that is inevitably coming in this country. They will need to be able to cover up what they are doing and blame what they are inflicting on ordinary people, both working class and middle class, on selected scapegoats, whether it is the poor, ethnic minorities, immigrants or foreigners in general, all the while enthusiastically waving the Union Jack and celebrating the British Empire. This is the role Fox News has played in the US as well as fostering a Trump personality cult. As Frum reveals, a poll in 2019 showed that of Republican supporters who got their information from Fox News, '55 percent said there was virtually nothing President Trump could do that would change their minds about supporting him'. More generally, Trump's millions of hardcore supporters, according to Frum, 'live in an isolated knowledge community that has developed its own situational ethics'. As he points out, they 'wanted to lock up Hillary Clinton for sending and receiving emails on a personal server, not caring even slightly when Ivanka Trump did the exact same thing . . . They plunged into a QAnon fantasy of a wise and good Trump poised to crush a global ring of child molesters – in order to avoid the reality of a malignant Trump who by his own admission had preyed upon teenage beauty queen pageant contestants'. He concludes somewhat sadly that 'for the sake of flag and faith, millions of decent conservative Americans countenanced scandals, wrongs, disloyalty and crime'. (p. 34) This is too generous, however, because they also countenanced, as he acknowledges elsewhere, racism, cruelty and a President who was a threat to American democracy.

Not all is doom and gloom, however. Trump has lost, if he ever had, the support of the military with hostility increasing 'the higher the rank'. (p. 91) A poll conducted by the *Military Times* towards the end of 2019 found that his standing within the military deteriorated through 2018 and 2019, 'not only among officers but enlistees too . . . a plurality of troops of all ranks now disapproved of Trump's presidency, and 45.8 percent "strongly disapproved"'. (p. 93) It would be interesting to know how much support Trump has among the police across the US. And, once again, as Frum points out, polling has shown that most Americans (76 percent) opposed war with Iran, including '63 percent of Republicans'. (p. 171) More generally, he hopes that the Republican Party, that 'has morphed under Trump into a party of white ethnic chauvinism', inhabited by what he describes as the 'zombified' Republicans, is in retreat. (pp. 68, 80) Hopefully, US conservatism will recover in the fullness of time and Trump

will come to be seen as 'only a sad and squalid figure out of history'; but if he is elected for a second term 'some things will be wrecked forever'. As he writes of the Republican Party, it has 'enabled Trump's corruption and authoritarianism through four years. It backed him against the most emphatically justified impeachment in US history. Its strategy for electing him depends on visibly preventing minorities from voting and welcoming foreign interference in US elections . . . What will be the character of such a political party after such a history?' His conclusion is devastating: the Republican Party will have 'degenerated into a caudillo's personal entourage, a cult of personality that exists to enable and protect the maximum leader'. And, he insists, no two party democracy can survive 'unless both parties adhere to democratic values'. (p. 189)

There is much more of interest in Frum's book. He certainly takes the coming climate catastrophe more seriously than he did in his earlier *Trumpocracy*, which is something to be welcomed, and explores the great increase in inequality in the US that has accelerated this century. Let us end, though, with reference to Frum's debate with Steve Bannon, one of the Munk debate series, that took place in Toronto in 2018. Here he actually argued that 'extreme inequality' is a threat to 'the liberal order', that there are people whose massive accumulation of wealth gives them 'power that in a liberal state nobody should have'. Reflecting on when he studied Roman history in the 1970s, he remarks that no one should be rich enough to be able to field a private army and back then such an idea would have been 'pretty laughable'. But in 2018, 'Mark Zuckerberg could afford to field a private army, lots of people can afford to do that. We do live in a world of oligarchs. We live in a world of individuals who are as powerful as states'.³ The obscenity of private space programmes is probably the best demonstration of this reality at the moment. The problem though is that while he has certainly recognised the problem, he has come nowhere near a solution.

Gaslighting America

Amanda Carpenter is a right-wing journalist, the author back in 2006 of *The Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy's Dossier on Hillary Clinton*, a volume which, despite the spoof title, is a full-blown attack on Clinton for being soft on illegal immigration, pro-abortion, unreliable on gay marriage, weak on defence and corrupt. The book was a 'main Selection of the Conservative Book Club'. It was published by Regnery Publishing which has also published the likes of Sarah Palin, Ann Coulter, Mike Pence and

³ Rudyard Griffiths (ed), *The Rise of Populism: Stephen K Bannon vs David Frum*, (Toronto: Anansi, 2018) pp. 27-28.

Newt Gingrich. It also publishes the appalling pro-Trump *Donald the Caveman* illustrated children's books written by one of the Christian Right's leading intellectual's, Eric Metaxas.⁴ And in her new book, *Gaslighting America*, she makes clear that she remains strongly anti-abortion, anti-gay rights, condemns Obama as soft on terrorism, is thrilled by Sarah Palin and is not only opposed to Obamacare but to Medicare and Medicaid as well. Carpenter's credentials might seem almost designed to recommend her to Donald Trump, but in the contest for the Republican nomination in 2016, she was an enthusiastic supporter of Ted Cruz. Indeed, as we shall see, she actually became collateral damage during the Trump camp's rubbishing of Cruz, an experience that seems to have given her at least some insight into their methods.

Carpenter writes with a mixture of incredulity and horror about Trump and his campaign. The man 'was dangerous. Nothing about him was conservative, civil or remotely reliable. He was crude and lied all the time, seemingly for fun'. (p. 50) Trump and his allies lied and lied and lied 'with a smile, posing as truth-tellers while launching an all-out assault on facts and values alike'. In order to board the Trump train, 'outward expressions of belief in Trump's grand lies were required, litmus tests of loyalty'. She recalls her disappointment as people she respected bent the knee once Trump won the nomination: 'I watched devout evangelicals champion a foul-mouthed, thrice-married casino magnate who loved talking dirty . . . profited off the young women he paraded around in various stages of undress in his beauty pageants and casino strip clubs; and bragged about grabbing women "by the pussy".' When she had been a student she had 'knocked on doors' for Mike Pence, 'the unflinchingly polite and pious evangelical congressman', only for him to now praise Trump as the 'next Ronald Reagan' and agree to run as his Vice President. And as for Ted Cruz, he endorsed a man he correctly described as a 'pathological liar'. But, as she observes, she should not have really been surprised because they 'are politicians, after all'. (p. 2)

Carpenter became a victim of the Trump campaign as part of their effort to destroy Ted Cruz. She had left his campaign and joined CNN when the *National Enquirer*, 'owned by one of Trump's oldest and proudest fans', ran a story accusing Cruz of having had affairs with five

⁴ For the Donald the Caveman books see my 'And We All Lived Happily Ever After', *Socialist Review*, May 2020. The first two volumes, *Donald Drains the Swamp* (2018) and *Donald Builds the Wall* (2019), have recently been joined by *Donald and the Fake News* (2020). We can only look forward with eager anticipation to the forthcoming *Donald and Stormzy Get It On*, *Donald Avoids Paying His Taxes*, *Donald Grabs Pussy*, *Donald's Best Friend Vladimir Helps Out*. The list is potentially endless.

women and she was told that she was going to be exposed as one of the five. (p. 56) In fact, she was not named but she was one of the five women with blurred-out faces pictured on the front page. The headline was 'IT'S OVER FOR PERVY TED'. That she was one of the five went viral (as was intended) and she found herself engulfed by an 'endless barrage of slime'. Her 'online harassment was brutal' with both her husband and two young children getting some attention as well. One of her friends, who worked in online analytics, told her that over one seventy-two hour period 'there were over 46,000 tweets directed at me'. Trolls claimed to have evidence of her affair with Cruz, that it had been confirmed by family members and then the social media director of Trump's campaign, Dan Scavino, 'tweeted out a ridiculous video full of photos of me claiming to "prove" the affair I never had with Cruz'. (p. 66) Even while this smear was unfolding online, Trump went out of his way to publicly insult Cruz's wife's appearance. He denied any knowledge of the Cruz story in the *National Enquirer*, which he hoped was not true, although the magazine was, he pointed out, often right in its allegations. Trump went on to raise the question of whether Cruz was entitled to become President as he was born in Canada, urging him to prove his eligibility. Birtherism was not just used against Obama! The ultimate strike against Cruz, however, was the *National Enquirer* front page headline 'TED CRUZ FATHER LINKED TO JFK ASSASSINATION'. Once again, Trump claimed to have nothing to do with this story being run, but once it was out there took relentless advantage of it. This is his Gaslighting method, which she dismantles at great, indeed remorseless length. There are five steps to his technique. First, he appears on Fox News and refers to a story that his people, either his campaign or his supporters, have put out there. Step Two will see him appear on a mainstream news channel to deny he believes the story, although it needs further investigation thereby still ensuring it gets maximum publicity. Step Three sees him keeping the story out there by promising to provide further information. Step Four will involve him resorting to Twitter to attack those criticising him or disputing the story. Step Five sees him claiming vindication for whatever position he thinks most useful and celebrating what a successful genius he is.

One can certainly appreciate her disappointment at Cruz for bowing down before Trump, but there is still a lingering suspicion that the ferocity of her own reaction to the Trump team's methods was, at least in part, because she had herself been one of his victims.

Running Against The Devil

Rick Wilson is the author of *Everything Trump Touches Dies* (2018), a

savage Never Trump assault on Trump and his people that put on display a remarkable talent for abuse and invective (reviewed in *Lobster* 77⁵). He figures in the Saldin and Teles book as one of a number of 'less established and younger consultants' for whom 'opposing Trump has enabled them to stand out', but as Wilson himself is quoted as saying, his stance has ended his career in the Republican Party. He still advises some Republican candidates privately, but if his name goes public they are warned to drop him or to prepare to be destroyed. (Saldin and Teles, pp. 122-123) In his new book, *Running Against The Devil*, he describes Trump as 'the worst president in history', but warns that incredibly he could still win a second term. (p. 7) Trump, as far as Wilson is concerned, 'owes his election to the Russians' and his appeal to overt racism was 'beyond shame'. Under Trump, the White House 'is lavishly and obviously corrupt to a degree unprecedented in modern history'. The man 'has monetized every moment of his occupancy of the Oval Office to sell hotel rooms and golf course membership'. 'Trump and his scavenger spawn' have cashed in for the past four years, but this is just preparing the way for his second term. He writes:

'The next four years will make the Trump administration's first four pale in comparison. The kleptocratic festival of crony capitalism, lobbyist giveaways, consumer-screwing protections for predatory lenders, environmental rapine, immigration cruelty and fiscal insanity in his first term was a warmup act. In the second, all the restraints are off.'

The 'Trump crime family' will come into its own. (pp. 28-29) These people view the American government 'as an ATM for their crapulous enterprises and nation-state level grifting'. As Wilson points out, the way Trump has installed 'Ivanka and her android husband, Jared, in the White House was already the greatest display of nepotism in presidential history'. (pp. 68-69). But 'Kim Jung Don' has only just begun his subversion of US democracy. For Wilson, 'Words fail to describe how bad four more years of Donald Trump would be for America and the world'. We are in 'an existential moment . . . it's the real apocalyptic deal'. (p. 22). And he warns that Trump actually has dynastic ambitions, something he would have once considered ludicrous, but now he is not so sure. Donald Trump Jr, he tells us, is already being groomed for the 2024 GOP primaries. Mike Pence has been unceremoniously shafted to make way for the installation of a hereditary Presidency or at least that is what Trump hopes. The 'corruption and collapse' of the Republican Party 'will enable their dynastic

⁵ See note 2 above.

fantasies to play out with real consequences for the country' as the 'Orange Kardashians', assisted by 'the shameless hucksterism of Fox', take over once and for all. (pp. 67-68)

To prevent the nightmare of a Trump second term, Wilson offers the Democrats his unsolicited advice. They must make the 2020 election a referendum on Trump and not on policy. He reminds them that Obama won in 2008 by standing as 'a technocratic centrist, scanning as a liberal Republican'. We 'tried to scare the shit out of people on him, and it frankly just didn't work'. (p. 98) The Democrats have to avoid any policies if possible and, if not, at least any policies that can be twisted into threats to the continued existence of the country. The Democrats have to recognise that they are taking on people 'who see any lie or conspiracy theory that accomplishes their beloved goal of owning the libs as acceptable and, in fact, desirable'. They have to be ready to push back instantaneously no matter how off-the-wall the stories are otherwise they can expect 'a meaningful fraction of the American people to buy into characterizations of your candidate's life, morals, finances, religious practices, and sexual appetites that are lurid crazy and utterly false'. They have got to be ready for 'deepfake attacks', stories appearing online that are wholly untrue, altogether fantastic, manufactured, even using photoshopped images and doctored film to discredit Joe Biden. One of the intentions of this material will be to divide the Democratic Party, get them fighting each other, leaving the way clear for Trump. (p. 164) Is he exaggerating? He insists this is what is coming down the road. And he goes on to warn of the potency of Trump's own tweets, 'the crapulous wellspring of his endless river of bullshit, polluted and polluting. It is like a biblical flood of divisive mendacity, a shameful example of dementia, sociopathic behaviour, foot-stomping rage . . . and a window into the hideous, Lovecraftian landscape of Trump's id'. (p. 156). Wilson certainly has a way with words!

This is all extremely depressing, but Wilson does offer the Democrats advice on how to fight back, on taking the war to Trump. One particularly interesting suggestion is that while there are 'some good folks inside Trump's demographic', there are also many whose views will positively, actively repel voters, including many thinking of voting for Trump. The Democrats have to elevate the neo-Nazis and white supremacists, 'the likes of alt-right leaders like Richard Spencer, Klan scum like David Duke, and the entire enterprise of alt-right assholes into Trump's running mates'. As he eloquently puts it, 'not every Trump supporter is a vile, cousin-fucking, Jew-hating racist shitbird, but in 2020, all the vile cousin-fucking, Jew-hating racist shitbirds are Trump supporters'. His

encouragement of and support for the Far Right has to be used against him. Trump's 'inflammatory language' has 'poisoned our culture', with a 'terrible cost in lives and suffering'. He has to be held responsible. Wilson emphasises the importance of Trump's Charlottesville stance in this regard, but, as I write, he has made it the centrepiece of his campaign for a second term. As Wilson puts it, 'Trump almost uniquely in presidential history, is supported and surrounded by people who can be seen as nothing but evil . . . Make him own it.' (pp. 265-266, 296). This will rally the Democratic Party's supporters and will cause Trump problems with sections of his own supporters. As for the Christian Right, forget them because they are surely 'damned'. They worship Trump. He is 'their golden calf'. The Democrats have to recognise that they 'cannot reach them' and should 'Stop talking to them'. (pp. 272-273)

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The 2020 Presidential election is the most important contest for many years. Because of Trump's climate crisis denial and the likely catastrophic consequences of another term for the whole planet, some would argue the most important ever. At the time of writing, the Republican Party seems altogether lost to bourgeois democratic politics, with the threat of even worse coming down the road whether he wins or loses. Certainly more and more 'mainstream Republicans' who were content to ride along with Trump when he seemed to be winning, regardless of the consequences for the American people, have been trying to distance themselves from him, some even repudiating him. The quite incredible revelation that the appalling Mitch McConnell, Republican leader in the Senate, was effectively boycotting the White House because of the lack of COVID precautions shows the full extent of the hypocrisy of these people. He took steps to protect himself but did not feel any obligation to warn anyone else about the danger Trump posed. Whatever the outcome of the election and however turbulent what will hopefully be the last months of Trump's tenure the Never Trumpers books remain relevant, useful and worth reading.

John Newsinger is a retired academic working on things Trumpian and (slowly) on the foreign, colonial and defence policies of the Labour Party.