

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT TRUMP

By Herman Greene

Sustainability involves both nature and human societies. In our view there are three criteria for sustainability:

- (1) The human community must live within Earth's carrying capacity. According to the Ecological Footprint Network we humans are now at 150% of the carrying capacity of Earth and rising;
- (2) Within the human community there must be justice, equity, respect, and inclusion for all humans and human communities. This requires sufficiency for all humans, and one part of the human community (both inside and outside developed countries) cannot unduly burden Earth.
- (3) Biodiversity must be protected and Earth's life systems must be healthy.

Thomas Berry was always very clear that Earth comes first. He expressed this, among other ways, by saying "Earth is primary, humans are derivative." A corollary of this was his statement that "without the Earth, the human is an abstraction." And here's another:

There is no way we can attend to the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, unless we attend at the same time to the "poor" of the endangered species, strip-mined hills, eroded crop lands, polluted rivers, acidified lakes, and gutted mountains. It is all of a piece, justice for the poor people, justice for the Earth. If we divorce people from Earth and pretend we are working for the poor while ignoring what is happening to their life support systems, i.e., oceans, air, soil, plant and animal species, we are duping ourselves and them.

One way we of CES have said this is, "The ecological crisis is the primary limiting factor in human development."

Donald Trump doesn't believe any of this. On May 21, 2017, at an "Arab-Islamic-American Summit" in Riyadh, Trump, with family in tow, strode onto the world stage like an American Caesar. He was the guest of Saudi Arabia "arguably the world's last absolute monarchy" ruled by the King and dominated by the House of Saud, the royal family.<sup>1</sup> During the visit, Ivanka Trump gave a message to a group of Saudi women of female empowerment through entrepreneurship without speaking to the almost insuperable difficulties posed for women entrepreneurs due to Saudi Arabia being "the world's most repressive society for women, a

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Cole, "Trump in Absolute Monarchy during Iran's Election," Informed Comment, May 21, 2017, <https://www.juancole.com/2017/05/absolute-monarchy-election.html> (accessed May 22, 2017).

place where women are not allowed to drive, must cover themselves from head to toe in public and require permission from a 'male guardian' to travel outside their homes."<sup>2</sup>



For Trump being “transactional” is the norm. This means recognizing where “real” interests—money and security—are involved and making deals around them with disregard for all else. All else is national, sovereign, protected. As if Trump would have had standards to offer, Trump declared to the gathered leaders, “We are not here to lecture—we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.”<sup>3</sup>

Trump proceeded to give a completely industrialized, militarized, and sectarian vision of the future. Defeat of terrorism was the goal. This contest was one of good vs. evil. The enemy strangely was not ISIS, but Iran. Victory would lead to prosperity. These leaders in Riyadh, so remote from their own people, and this leader from the United States, so remote from his unwitting base . . . would this lead to either peace or prosperity? Nowhere were the underlying

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<sup>2</sup> Karen DeYoung, “Ivanka Trump meets with Saudi women leaders as some activists remain critical.” *Washington Post*, May 21, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/ivanka-trump-meets-with-saudi-women-leaders-as-some-activists-remain-critical/2017/05/21/9406c4ee-3e08-11e7-adba-394ee67a7582\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.78c0f26966a8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/ivanka-trump-meets-with-saudi-women-leaders-as-some-activists-remain-critical/2017/05/21/9406c4ee-3e08-11e7-adba-394ee67a7582_story.html?utm_term=.78c0f26966a8) (accessed May 22, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> “Transcript of Trump’s Speech in Saudi Arabia,” CNN, May 21, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/politics/trump-saudi-speech-transcript/> (accessed May 22, 2017).

ecological or social causes of terrorism or of the wider sufferings and unrest in the region addressed.<sup>4</sup>



Meanwhile back in the United States the *Washington Post's* headline read, "Food stamps, Medicaid on chopping block in Trump's budget,"<sup>5</sup> and already we had heard of a proposed 31% cut in Environmental Protection Agency funding.<sup>6</sup> Trump and his cohorts exemplify what Saskia Sassen wrote about in *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*<sup>7</sup> . . . for the dispossessed, displaced, disempowered, poor, and non-human: *expulsion*.

But what to do?

What sustains *this* man in power? The American political system through an election gave him presidential powers. It is a system with fairly strong checks and balances except at the presidential level. The president is exempt from so many rules and there is really only one real

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<sup>4</sup> For additional commentary on the speech, see Juan Cole's article cited above.

<sup>5</sup> "Trump's blueprint for the 2018 budget year comes out Tuesday. It includes reductions to benefit programs such as Medicaid, the government insurance program for the poorest and many disabled Americans; federal employee pensions, welfare benefits and farm subsidies." Andrew Taylor, , "Food stamps, Medicaid on chopping block in Trump's budget," *Washington Post*, May 22, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/health\\_care/huge-cuts-to-food-stamps-part-of-trumps-budget-proposal/2017/05/21/f2e42e22-3e8d-11e7-b29f-f40ffced2ddb\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.94cd9355a919](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/health_care/huge-cuts-to-food-stamps-part-of-trumps-budget-proposal/2017/05/21/f2e42e22-3e8d-11e7-b29f-f40ffced2ddb_story.html?utm_term=.94cd9355a919) (accessed May 22, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> "The Trump administration's proposed cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency budget are deep and wide-ranging. It seeks to shrink spending by 31 percent, to \$5.7 billion from \$8.1 billion, and to eliminate a quarter of the agency's 15,000 jobs." Hiroki Tabuchi, "What's at Stake in Trump's Proposed E.P.A. Cuts," *New York Times*, April 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/climate/trump-epa-budget-cuts.html> (accessed May 22, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

remedy for errant presidential conduct while in office, and that is impeachment. Still the American president does not have unfettered power and he must have some allies.

There are no natural allies for Donald Trump, other than those who came to admire him as a result of his reality TV show. Otherwise trampling standards, norms and conventions, uninvited he barged onto the scene. He first defeated 16 Republican candidates. And then he defeated a Democratic candidate who was unable to overcome the burdens of Bill Clinton's history, Obama's history, her own foibles and history, the Russian hacking, the fake news, and the Comey initiatives, and who could not match the intensity generated by the entertainment and effrontery of the populist Donald J. Trump.

Trump promised to stick it to the liberal elite, and to do it with patriotism and pride. He would make America great again. His base now revels in his unorthodoxy and celebrates his apparent economic achievements, delivery on the Supreme Court, and his displays of American military strength. They regard the "deep state" and Democrats as out to get him and obstruct his program of reform. Abandoning historic conservative values, standards, and policy positions, they have no need to reconcile Trump's conduct with these historic norms.

Republican and business elites make an uneasy alliance with one who is not of them. The super wealthy jump on his ship of state, not to promote economic nationalism as Trump promised to do, but to see that policy is conducted as they would have it. Conservative politicians, hoping that the government and Trump will not implode before they are done, pursue their feverish dreams of tax cuts for the wealthy, the end of the welfare state, and the rise of the impossibly contradictory libertarian-traditionalist-security state.

The latest Gallup poll shows that 38% of Americans regard Trump's job performance favorably and 56% unfavorably.<sup>8</sup> It does not take majority approval to govern, however. The uneasy alliances above are enough when bolstered with majorities in both houses of Congress, majorities in most state legislatures and a majority of governorships, a potentially sympathetic supreme court, gerrymandering, money in politics, and voter suppression. Further, the electorate faced with a bewilderingly complex political process tends to be apathetic, unanalytical, and poorly informed.

The opposition on the left sees the government as the answer to everything also with little analysis. Too often for them, concern over global warming does not mean taking serious steps to stop it but rather insistence that everyone must believe in global warming, making that an end in itself. Too often this is also true of liberal concerns about poverty, racism, and other injustices: "The government should take care of these things! Are you, like me, against these things?!"

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<sup>8</sup> "President Trump Job Approval," RealClear Politics, [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/president\\_trump\\_job\\_approval-6179.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/president_trump_job_approval-6179.html) (accessed May 22, 2017).

Trump is frighteningly situated to bring about social and ecological catastrophe. If this occurs it will be for this that he is known, not for making America great again. He is also frighteningly situated to stymie the real reforms that are needed. The clock is ticking on the ecological and social challenges of our time, challenges that exceed in their complexity and breadth those ever presented. There is no time for delay and yet with Trump we get delay and worse.

The best thing to do about Trump is for his political allies to wake up and realize that this man is a danger to society and should be removed from office as quickly as possible. This would be good for the country and probably would be best for the Republican Party in the long run. Daily the news gets worse for Trump and those in his circle and those who assisted his campaign.<sup>9</sup> Some on the left think elevating Pence to president would only make matters worse because Pence would be a more effective leader and spokesman for conservative causes. Also, they believe keeping Trump around would increase the likelihood of Democratic victories in 2018. I disagree, because I think Trump is a unique danger and should be removed. With regard to having a more effective spokesman for conservative ideas in Pence, I say fine—let there be a contest of ideas on the merits not on the basis of personalities.

Whether or not Trump is removed, here is what we must do:

- (1) We must keep getting truth out to the best of our ability and this includes accessing and supporting reliable sources of news and analysis.
- (2) While both political parties are imperfect and 40% of Americans regard themselves as independents, we must accept political compromise and, for the most part, advance our political causes through the Democratic Party and work to advance the representatives of that party. The Green party and the disaffected left need to see themselves as Green Democrats and left or radical Democrats. The current direction in American politics will likely not change until the positions of the two primary parties are reversed.
- (3) We need people to engage in politics as candidates, supporters, advocates and as members of citizen boards. There are a wide array of offices from US president to local school board member. Each level is important.
- (4) For those who work through the Republican Party, recover sound conservative principles and norms and be a strong center-right party. Be an advocate for social justice and prove that Republicans can responsibly deal with the critical issues of our time.
- (5) Study the processes of governance, hold conferences and colloquies on reform of these process, and promote long-term structural reforms, including in our lifetimes a Second US Constitutional Convention.

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<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Greg Sargent, "The Walls Are Closing In," *Washington Post*, May 23, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2017/05/23/the-walls-are-closing-in/?hpid=hp\\_no-name\\_opinion-card-c%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.306d96dea04f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2017/05/23/the-walls-are-closing-in/?hpid=hp_no-name_opinion-card-c%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.306d96dea04f) (accessed May 23, 2017).

- (6) Move the focus of politics from individual rights to communal rights, from private property to the global commons, from private profit to common wealth, and from economics and security to ecology, culture, and human development.
- (7) Resist—engage in protest, write letters, advocate, listen to and help the disempowered and disenfranchised.
- (8) Be a pioneer, make changes wherever you can. All changes are cumulative.
- (9) Take on the big issues of how we are going to live within planetary boundaries, provide sufficiency for all, and protect nature. Do not settle.
- (10) Have faith in the future and in your fellows. Build community.

Remember the importance of government. David Orr wisely wrote:

Only governments have the power to set the rules for the economy, enforce the law, levy taxes, ensure the fair distribution of income, protect the poor and future generations, cooperate with other nations, negotiate treaties, defend the public interest, and protect the rights of posterity. Errant governments can wage unnecessary wars, squander the national treasure and reputation, make disastrous environmental choices, and deregulate banks and financial institutions, with catastrophic results. In other words, we will rise or fall by what governments do or fail to do. The long emergency ahead will be the ultimate challenge to our political creativity, acumen, skill, wisdom and foresight.<sup>10</sup>

These things and more, we must do.

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<sup>10</sup> David Orr, *Down to the Wire: Confronting Climate Collapse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7-8.