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Letter to the Editor: ‘Something Rotten’: A Dispatch from the United States of America

Michael Broz

“There must be something rotten in the very core of a social system which increases its wealth without diminishing its misery.”

—Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (1971, 1)

A specter has landed in the United States of America—that specter is fascism. President Donald Trump has made fascism socially acceptable, but it has been a festering abscess of political hatred here for a long time. The fact that he granted cis, hetero, and white people the privilege of being publicly angry about a society that holds racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and xenophobic attitudes and behaviors accountable is, in and of itself, the most appealing aspect of this president, for those who support him. Trump is creating a fascist dystopia, in which freedom of speech is reserved for white, conservative Christian Americans, while he censors and punishes everyone else who disagrees with the culture of the MAGA movement.

As a born American living in Texas who identifies as gay, is an activist for Palestinian rights, a communist, and a vocal critic of Trump, I consider that the first year of Trump's second term has been among the most disturbing periods of my life. Trump is now channeling the vitriol he directed at immigrants and focusing it on individuals believed to be enemies of the state. Lack of *habeas corpus* results in the absence of trial, judge, and attorney: the groundwork, currently being used to repress immigrants, to be redirected onto political dissidents and other "home-grown," as Trump refers to them (Mann 2025). The crushing stillness that follows each new turn in Trump's America, including now the war by executive order on Iran, is both more terrible and more audible than the language Trump uses as weaponry.

A family friend I've known for most of my life, a man with whom I grew up as an uncle, no longer speaks to me after a recent dinner party at his house. We had always been able to discuss politics, even though he did not agree with my values, but after I responded positively to his question that night—"Are you a communist?"—he removed me from social media, and we have not communicated since. That is the power of propaganda that pertains to the left. I grew up in a US public school after the Cold War. I assumed that communists

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were wrong. The anti-communist (anti-Soviet) propaganda baby boomers grew up with all but rendered the notion of communism, at best, as “sounds good on paper but doesn’t work in practice.” There is now an optics-based form of McCarthyism, resulting in the outright rejection of leftism by both major parties in the US—NYC Mayor-elect Mahmoud Mamdani and Bernie Sanders being outliers. The failure of leftism has become not only palatable to US leaders but also “common sense” (Pinsky 2025). In contrast, Mark Pinsky describes his communist cousin, Si:

The Communist Party U.S.A. had many faults—notably blind Stalinist-Soviet Union allegiance—but the 1930s party was admirably ahead of its time in militantly supporting trade unions and fighting for racial equality in the South. Thus, it is no surprise it drew Si’s allegiance as he was toggling between teaching and mechanic jobs. In 1937, like many other American communists and leftists, Si joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, to defend Spain’s Republic from Francisco Franco’s Nazi-supported, fascist Falange. Si became a political commissar; his battery was named for John Brown, the Harper’s Ferry, Va., pre-Civil War insurrectionist.

Such historically informed opinion is now almost totally absent. Now, we, in the US, seem unable to accept any shift in opinion that would make communism even partly acceptable. It is a historical farce. The US, prior to WWII, had socialist congressmen and parties that were fought by the right but were at least considered a legitimate power in themselves. As Eric Ross (2025) argues:

In the United States, we long ago chose the path of barbarism. Trump and his enablers have proven major catalysts in hastening our descent, but they are symptoms as well as causes. The compounding crises of our time, from ecological collapse to immense inequality to endless war, were clearly foreseeable aberrations. They are the logical outgrowths of a capitalist system built on violent exploitation and rooted in the constant struggle to prioritize profits over people.

The idea that communism is evil is now as ingrained in Americans as the Pledge of Allegiance. The most insidious aspect of this situation is the normalization of dismissive treatment. In addition to the job-related repercussions and social vilification that have become entrenched in Trump’s America, there are other everyday challenges to being leftist in this country. Criticism of Trump is conflated with criticism of the US and its population. Criticism is met with wholesale rejection, dismissed without being listened to (Greenhut 2025). You conceal your beliefs and avoid discussing them with neighbors or family. It’s a kind of political schizophrenia, where honesty is met with rejection and, worse, retaliation by the government, including extrajudicial measures. Receiving text messages and alerts from friends and organizations to let you know where ICE is working in the city happens daily. Regardless of your citizenship status, ICE can detain and deport you, American citizen or not. ICE often targets low-income areas, so the alerts are essential for the people in those communities, as

they are already more vulnerable than their privileged counterparts (Gamboa, 2025). As a close friend of mine, Jorge Malverde, an immigrant from Mexico, told me, “Everybody is very afraid; they hide in their homes. They just want to survive.” ICE has oppressed these immigrant communities, often located in low-income areas, with the aim of destroying community. Leftists retaliate by fortifying community, as we’ve seen in Minnesota following the murders of Renée Macklin Good and Alex Pretti.

In a horrible turn, Trump’s administration has also begun to draw from the fascist playbook to create concentration camps for immigrants, and likely other “threats to the state” (Pitzer 2024). The administration has increased its detention capacity by 91% in eleven months (Reichlin-Melnick 2026). People are being deported from these facilities at a rate 14 times higher than that of those allowed a hearing (Reichlin-Melnick). This lack of judicial oversight—straight deportation—coupled with lack of transparency about what is happening in these concentration camps means the risk is high.

The spirit ICE has brought, and its playbook, are not novel. Much of what ICE does has been taken directly from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). A concerted physical presence with propaganda has been how the state of Israel has been able to convince much of the world that any anti-Zionist sentiment is inherently anti-Semitic, crippling efforts to aid Palestine and securing US government funding for genocide. With the allegations that Jeffrey Epstein was working for Israeli intelligence, we potentially have further indication of how Israeli oppression is exported to the US and the rest of the world. Much like the IDF, we see former Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem telling us, on live television, that Alex Pretti was aggressive with a firearm against law enforcement, though video evidence is clear that the weapon was never even unholstered until an ICE agent took it away; seconds later, an ICE agent fired 7 bullets into Pretti’s back, while Pretti was lying, face down, with no weapon, on a street in Minneapolis (Gibson 2026). Axios reports that “for the second time in less than a month, President Trump’s top officials rushed to declare that a U.S. citizen killed by U.S. immigration agents was a ‘domestic terrorist’ ” (Gibson 2026).

The attacks range far beyond physical assaults by masked thugs on the streets. Consider the violence towards academics and higher education. In my home city of Dallas, high school students have been walking out of schools, during instruction, to protest ICE and the Trump Administration’s actions. Texas A&M University, the alma mater of family and friends, has removed all gender, LGBTQIA+, and women’s studies courses and programs, firing professors in some cases (Davis 2026). The focus on gender and women’s studies is a direct attack on transgender people in the US and around the world. Trump has ramped up the rhetoric, attempting to instill fear in the populace of ever having to go into the bathroom, locker room, or sports venue with a transgender person. Using words like “rape,” “unnatural,” and “transgender ideology,” Trumpism seeks to turn all those who challenge a cis and hetero normative country into supporters of sexual assault, child abuse, and unfair treatment due to biological differences. Trans men and women have been some of the most politically active and compelling forces in gender and LGBTQIA+ com-

munities. One needs only think of Marsha P. Johnson throwing the brick through the window at Stonewall, or Sylvia Rivera leading protests and suffering violence at the hands of law enforcement, all the while not giving up. The new American norm is to find fear in everything but white, male, wealthy, cis, hetero, conservative ideology. At the same time as the mouthpieces of such a 'healthy, normal America' are clearly implicated, by the Epstein files, in child trafficking and pedophilia: Trump, and many major Republican and Democratic politicians, including Elon Musk, Bill Gates, former President Bill Clinton, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Ubiera 2026).

I could go on and on. This is one small part of the fascist playbook in the US. Trump's administration hits the public with so many different activities and claims that it is nearly impossible to ascertain the full picture of any of it. This playbook is neither new nor novel, pulling the most effective strategies of fascist and dictatorial states into the arsenal of the most powerful government in the world. A world gone upside down: the America in which I was born is no longer. The US was transformed following the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Bush administration was responsible for laying the foundation for fascism: starting with the bipartisan Patriot Act, we surrendered our rights to the government (Lyons 2025). This history of fascism does not begin with Bush, though it certainly intensified significantly during his presidency. As Matthew Lyons (2025) writes in *New Politics*:

This era is hardly the first time that U.S. leftists have warned against the rise of a fascist state. FBI/police repression against the Black Panthers, Joe McCarthy's Cold War witch hunts, and even Franklin Roosevelt's early New Deal experiments with state-sponsored cartels—sections of the left have labeled all of these as fascist. But George W. Bush has come to embody the f-word for a whole generation of activists.

The so-called War on Terror changed a nation that had defended dissent and assembly in its civil society. The Trump administration and Republican Congress have catapulted from this groundwork.

Until there is greater resistance against this administration, among Republicans and everyone else, fascism will continue.

Biography

Michael Broz is a doctoral candidate at Memorial University of Newfoundland, living in his home country of the US. He has published articles and book reviews dealing with Karl Marx, capitalism, and art. He serves as Book Review Editor and Technical Processing Editor at *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*.

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