

TRUMP, Prez for Life (Imprisonment)

I think it's pretty much inevitable that the Trump will use his own version of Hitler's Reichstag fire to expand his power and take full control of the government during a "state of emergency." My gut feeling is that Trump and his administration will try and that it won't work. Not so much because we are so great but because we have a little bit of time to prepare. I also think that there are enough people and enough agencies of the government who have also thought about this and would not just go along.

The whole point of my new book, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, is that we have a century of wisdom and very smart people who confronted situations like our own - but usually more demanding - and that wisdom can be condensed. We ask for an inevitable coup by Trump by saying how human nature is the free market and the free market brings democracy, so everything is hunky-dory. And of course **every part of that story is nonsense**. The Greeks understood that democracy is likely to produce oligarchy because if you don't have some mechanism to get inequality under control then people with the most money will likely take full control.

With Trump, one sees the new variant of this where a candidate can run by saying, "Look, we all know - wink, wink, nudge, nudge - that this isn't really a democracy anymore." He doesn't use the words but basically says, "We all know this is really an oligarchy, so let me be your oligarch." Although it's nonsense and of course he's a con man and will betray everyone, it makes sense only in this climate of inequality.

One of the problems with American discourse is that we just assume everybody is a friendly democratic parliamentarian pluralist until proven otherwise. And then even when it's proven otherwise we don't have any vocabulary for it. He's a "dictator." He's an "authoritarian." He's "Hitler." We just toss these words around. Americans do not want to think that there is an alternative to what we have. Therefore, as soon as you

say "fascism" or whatever it might be, then the American response is to say "no" because we lack the categories that allow us to think outside of the box that we are no longer in. This is a function of *American Exceptionalism*.

We are moving towards intellectual isolationism in a world where no kind of isolationism is possible. What we ended up with, from Bill Clinton onward, is a status quo party and an "undo the system" party, where the Democrats became the status quo party and the Republicans became the "undo the system" party. In that constellation it's very hard to think of change because one party is in favor of things being the way they are, just slightly better, and the other party has this big idea of undoing everything, although it's unclear what that really means in practice. So no one is actually articulating how you address the problems of the day, the greatest of which would be inequality.

Trump succeeds despite his recurrent scandals because **he is primarily a television personality**. As such, he is judged by that standard. This means that **a scandal does not call forth a response; it calls forth the desire for a bigger scandal**. It just whets the appetite for a bigger scandal because a television serial has to work on that logic. It's almost as though he has to produce these outrageous things because what else would he be doing?

His survival, I think, has to do with attention span as well. It's not so much a lack of outrage; people are in fact outraged. But in order for a scandal to have political logic, the outrage has to be followed by the research. It has to be followed by the investigation. It has to be followed by an official finding. Creative ideas must get into meaningful circulation.

The thing that matters the most is to realize that in moments like this **your actions really do matter**. It is ironic but in an authoritarian regime-change situation, the individual matters more than in a democracy. In an authoritarian regime change, at the beginning the

individual has a special kind of power because the authoritarian regime depends on a certain kind of consent. Which means that if you are conscious of the moment that you are in, you can find the ways not to express your consent and you can also find the little ways to be a barrier. If enough people do that, it really can make a difference — but again **only at the beginning**.

At the beginning, you have to be as courageous as you can. Do you actually care enough about freedom that you would take risks? Do individuals actually care about freedom? Think that through. I think if enough of us **take the little risks at the beginning** this will prevent us from having to take bigger risks down the line.

We are still at a stage where protest is not illegal. We're still at a stage where protest is not lethal. Those are the two big thresholds. We are still on the good side of both of those thresholds and so now is the time you want to pack in as much as you can because you could actually divert things. Once you get into a world where protest is illegal, then the things that I recommend like getting out on the streets — they have to happen but they are much riskier. It's a much different kind of decision.

I hate to sound like a self-help person but I'm going to. Every day you don't do something, it makes it less likely that you will ever do something. So you've got to get started right away. *On Tyranny* is a suggestion of things that everyone can do. There are plenty of other great ideas from people coming from other traditions, but the basic thing is **you have to change your protocol of daily behavior now. Don't obey in advance because you have to start by orienting yourself against the general drift of things. You have to set your own habits now.**

Timothy Snyder
Author of *On Tyranny*
thanks to **Salon.com**
and Chauncey De Vega

Better NED than RED?

Since 2014, the U.S. **National Endowment for Democracy (NED)** - established in 1983 to promote democratic ideals in developing countries - has spent \$4.1 million on projects in Nicaragua. The NED has awarded projects to a wide variety of civic organizations. Seventeen grants were provided to unnamed organizations working within Nicaragua. In 2017, for example, the **NED** provided an **anonymous organization** with \$86,000 to foster "a new generation of democratic youth leaders." In the same year, the NED funded a project titled, "Strengthening the Strategic Capacity of Civil Society to Defend Democracy." Again, the **NED's** website does not report the name of the organization that received the grant. However, it does say the funds were used: "To strengthen the capacity of Nicaraguan pro-democracy activists to forge a common civil society strategy to defend democracy."

This is not the first time that **NED** funds have made an appearance in Central America's largest country. U.S. Congress created the **NED** - as a non-profit, private NGO - in 1983 at the height of the Cold War. The NED was designed to promote democracy overseas, and it was funded through the U.S. congress to remain autonomous from U.S. foreign policy. From 1984 to 1990, the U.S. **NED** spent roughly \$15.8 million dollars to fund civil society groups and political parties, most of them opposed to the Sandinista government. In 1990, against all odds, Chamorro defeated Daniel Ortega, and ushered in three consecutive terms of conservative

leadership. A chastened and more neoliberal Ortega was then returned to office on the *Pink Tide* that ushered in Chaves and Morales et. al.

NED has expanded a great deal since 1983. Today, funds from the **NED** support such euphemisms as civil society groups, election observation efforts and democratic political parties around the world, including in Africa and the Middle East. In fact, in the years leading up to the Arab Spring, the U.S. government donated NED funds to organizations pushing for American-style democracy in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

While **NED** resources are small compared to the money the U.S. Department of Defense spends abroad, the impact of NED projects, particularly in closed societies, is important. On April 14, 2011, referring to the role of the U.S. in the uprisings of the Arab Spring, Ron Nixon of the New York Times wrote: "The money spent on these programs was minute compared with efforts led by the Pentagon. But as American officials and others look back at the uprisings of the Arab Spring, they are seeing that the United States' democracy-building campaigns played a bigger role in fomenting protests than was previously known, with key leaders of the movements having been trained by the Americans in campaigning, organizing through new media tools and monitoring elections."

Looking back at the developments of the last several months, it is now quite evident that the U.S. government actively helped build the political space and capacity in Nicaraguan society for the social uprising that is currently unfolding.

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