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A kinder, gentler fascism

By Carla Binion

December 17, 2000—Classic fascism involves militarism, racism, destroying civil liberties, repressing the citizenry, crushing labor unions, deceptive propaganda and antidemocratic words and tactics. George W. Bush puts a happy face on fascistic tactics. He shows the public a compassionate conservative face, but his henchmen use brute force and propaganda to attain authoritarian goals.

For example, on November 22, a Republican-paid mob pounded on doors of the Miami-Dade County canvassing board and shoved and intimidated Democrats. The Wall Street Journal (11/27/00) reported that Bush later phoned and congratulated the mob of Brownshirts-lite.

Bush deceptively propagandizes Democrats when he puts on a front of seeking bipartisanship and unity. In reality, the Democrats he seeks as cabinet members hail from states where Republican governors would appoint their successors. If those Democrats “unify” with George W., it would alter the 50–50 split in the senate.

According to the 12/13/00 St. Petersburg Times, Republicans have earmarked money to campaign to impeach the Florida Supreme Court justices who opposed them. The Republican talk of unity and cooperation is a mask.

The classic Bertram Gross book, “Friendly Fascism,” quotes economist Robert Lekachman: “Ronald Reagan must be the nicest president who ever destroyed a union and tried to cut school lunch milk rations from six to four ounces . . . Ronald Reagan is tailored to the image of a friendly fascist.” It appears George W. Bush fits the image as well.

Militarism is another earmark of fascism. Vice-President-elect Dick Cheney wants to expand military spending. Let’s not forget that under Reagan, from 1981 to 1985, the Pentagon’s budget doubled and the secret spending for weapons increased eightfold. (“Blank Check,” Tim Weiner, 1990.)

Dick Cheney may plan to follow in Reagan’s footsteps. According to William D. Hartung (“And Weapons For All,” Harper Collins, 1994), Cheney was a big promoter of U. S. weapons sales when he served as George H. W. Bush’s Secretary of Defense.

Cheney, an architect of the Gulf War, claims he cares about U. S. troops. However, Hartung points out that during the Gulf War our troops were used to “play a mercenary role—bought and paid for by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Japan, Germany.”

Bill Greider bolsters Hartung's view. In "Fortress America," Greider says that despite rhetoric, U. S. soldiers were used as a mercenary army to defend the royal families of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and access to cheap oil. Greider writes that when pressed to choose between soldiers and weapons, government leaders often choose weapons, "closing bases, discharging soldiers and weakening our troop strength."

Antidemocratic views are another hallmark of fascism. During campaign 2000, many Bush supporters, including rightwing talk show propagandist Rush Limbaugh, expressed antidemocratic sentiments.

Limbaugh and other Bush supporters pushed the idea that the U. S. is a republic, not a democracy. However, we have always had democracy within the republic. In fact, America is a democratic republic, and a representative democracy.

Klaus P. Fischer in "Nazi Germany: A New History," writes that as Hitler rose to power, "all sorts of antidemocratic ideas, articulated in bold and urgent terms by conservative pundits came thundering down on perplexed Germans from all sorts of newspapers, books and journals." The rightwing pundits in Hitler's Germany argued against political parties and elections.

The Hitler supporters said democracy was "inherently contradictory because an amorphous mass of people could not actually define goals, set policies, or literally govern itself." They claimed elitism was realistic and democracy was not. Oswald Spengler wrote that "the fundamental right of the mass to choose its own representatives remains pure theory." These Nazis suggested democracy be replaced by a military junta or another authoritarian form of government.

As Hitler rose to power, he advanced militarism, destroyed civil liberties, crushed labor unions and plotted against racial groups, however, he put on a public face of egalitarianism. As Fischer says of Hitler, he downplayed the anti-Semitic views of his party and "mimicked the role of a respectable, middle-class politician." He won over working class Germans and conservative businessmen. "In 1929 very few people knew what Hitler was really like," writes Fischer.

Joseph Goebbels served as Hitler's main propagandist, or "mythmaking genius." Just as Rush Limbaugh and other rightwing talk show hosts demean blacks and other minority groups and whip their audiences into a frenzy of hatred for liberals, Goebbels stirred up his audience's hatred for Jewish people and for opponents of Nazism.

Klaus Fischer writes that Nazi Fritz Hippler made a hate film, "Der Ewige Jude," depicting the Jewish people as "cellar rats who scurry in and out of their holes and proceed to take over the world." Today's rightwing talk show hosts do for George W. Bush what Goebbels and team did for Hitler. Just think of the amount of hatred they have generated against the Clintons and liberals in general.

While Bush and his rightwing supporters are not classic fascists, and their goals do not include a Holocaust, they have shown a tendency toward such fascist behavior as militarism, racism, destroying civil liberties, repressing the citizenry, crushing labor unions, deceptive propaganda

and antidemocratic words and tactics. They are a somewhat lighter version of a very dark predecessor.

Bertram Gross suggests that the opposite of friendly fascism is real democracy, including stronger civil liberties. He quotes "The Book of Counted Sorrows:" "Evil is no faceless stranger living in a distant neighborhood. Evil has a wholesome, hometown face, with merry eyes and an open smile. Evil walks among us, wearing a mask which looks like all our faces."

Friendly fascists may talk of unity and bipartisanship while, at the same time, they work to co-opt Democratic senators and undercut the public's right to elect its representatives. They may smile and shake hands and promise to earn our trust. However, unmask the friendly fascist and you see an enemy of democracy and civil liberties. You see Hitler-with-a-happy-face, a compassionate conservative, a kinder-gentler sort of tyrant.

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