

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President Emeritus
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
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Globalism and the Upending of American Politics

Republicans responded to the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama with a visceral disdain and hatred for these two presidents. American evangelicals joined enthusiastically in such responses. Now Democrats are responding in almost identical ways to Donald Trump. As hardened as American conservatives were toward Clinton and Obama, now the American left is equally as hardened toward Trump.

In this *Perspective*, I want to develop an overview of what is occurring within both major political parties and comment on the new ideological battle of the 21st century.

- First, a few comments about the Democratic Party: Michelle Goldberg makes this insightful observation: President Trump “has forced liberals to experience the near-apocalyptic revulsion that conservatives have often felt toward Democratic presidents. In doing so, he has unwittingly created a new movement in American politics, as Democrats channel the sort of all-encompassing outrage that has long fueled grass-roots conservatism.” The emotional symmetry between the right toward Democratic presidents and the left toward Trump is astonishing. President Trump is “the living negation of all they value, a president who makes them ashamed before their children and terrified for their future.” The Democratic left now loathes Trump and this bitter hatred is fostering conspiracy theories and a genuine fear for the future of civilization as they know it. Amazingly, what we have seen over the last twenty-five years from the political right when it came to Democratic presidents is now being seen within the Democratic left in response to President Trump.
- Second, a few comments about the Republican Party. For Republicans, the Reagan era is over. The Trump takeover of the Party has remade American conservatism into a “pro-borders, anti-globalist movement.” The orthodoxies of Reaganism have been abandoned. The new message and apparent creed of the new Republican Party is “affirm nationalism and fight globalism.” Reagan would denounce big government, its waste and its inefficiencies, and he reveled in the message of cutting taxes. What resonates with Trump and his followers is “the wall,” deporting illegal immigrants, renegotiating trade deals and bringing back industrial jobs lost years ago. However, R.R. Reno, editor of the journal *First Things*, makes several astute observations about globalism:

1. Globalism does indeed pose a threat to the future of democracy “because it disenfranchises the vast majority and empowers technocratic elite. It is a telling paradox that the most ardent supporters of a ‘borderless world’ live in gated communities and channel their children toward a narrow set of elite educational institutions with stiff admissions standards that do the work of ‘border control.’ The airport executive lounges are not open and inclusive.”
2. The common citizen of America senses that in this global village, he/she no longer counts. Hence the political energy that Trump’s anti-elite paroxysms generated. Idealistic internationalism and globalist utopianism have hurt people. Trump’s movement understood that and that explains why regions and sections normally Democratic voted for him.
3. As Greg Ip of the *Wall Street Journal* correctly notes, the globalists have underestimated the collateral damage globalization has inflicted upon workers. They “placed too much weight on the strategic advantages of trade and dismissed too readily the value that many ordinary citizens still attach to national borders and cultural cohesion.”

But many in both political parties are missing an important political development in these early years of the 21st century: The ideological divide emerging is globalism versus nationalism. Historically, Great Britain presided over the first era of globalization, from the mid-1800s through 1914. They advocated free trade and the gold standard. That era gave way to an extreme era of nationalism, which produced World War II. But after World War II, “the logic of globalism shifted beyond trade to grand strategy. By ceding modest amounts of sovereignty to international institutions, a country could make the world, and itself, far stronger by pursuing its own narrowly defined interests.” For these globalists, economic and geopolitical self-interest were inseparable. Hence, the 1957 Treaty of Rome led to the formation of the European Union of 28 nations. The assumption? Economic and political integration would make war unthinkable. For the next five decades, trade, industrialization and demographics produced a cycle of rising prosperity. By the 2000s, globalism appeared triumphant. But, when Bill Clinton advocated for China joining the WTO, he predicted that this would “likely . . . have a profound impact on human rights and political liberty.” It did not! China met its WTO obligations but discriminated against foreign investors and products while maintaining an artificially cheap currency. “A wave of Chinese imports wiped out 2 million American jobs, with no equivalent boom in US jobs linked to exports to China.” Furthermore, China became even more repressive at home and antagonistic abroad. China was undermining the virtues of globalism.

Therefore, since the end of World War II, global integration and technological progress have fueled a new world order centered on free trade, open borders and interdependent economies. Goods, capital and people should be able to move freely across borders, which is actually the meaning of globalization. Those who have advocated for the ideology of globalism and worldwide economic integration seriously underestimated the risks and potential dangers

that would result from large parts of society feeling as if they were left behind, due to open trade with open borders as the world's economies integrated together. Those sentiments and real feelings explain why the Brexit vote was successful. Such developments also explain the emergence of Trump. Fundamentally, the ideology of nationalism is (temporarily?) providing a meaningful and energized alternative to the ideology of globalism.

Does Donald Trump represent a meaningful alternative to the utopianism of globalism? He does not yet have a well-developed ideological alternative. But he has surrounded himself with some smart people. He has several more months to begin to put his anti-globalist outbursts into a well-defined policy for the United States. He understood the hurt that globalism brought to many. Can he provide substantial cures for this hurt?

See Michelle Goldberg and R.R. Reno in the *New York Times* (30 April 2017) and Greg Ip in the *Wall Street Journal* (7-8 January 2017)