

Hitler's Rise: Are There Parallels to 2016?¹

Alice L. Eckardt

In 2015 Lehigh's Office of International Affairs became concerned about the incidents of hate speech and hate crimes in this country, and their potential impact on our students, especially those from other countries. In some round-about way those concerns led to my being invited to speak about the mid-20th century's first-hand experience with mass hate as it came to dominate Germany, and then more of the world, especially during the Hitler years. Are there lessons to be learned from that era? What happened in those years was, and has continued to be, a challenge to many long-accepted ideas and behaviors, and has called for much rethinking. Carrying that forward to the present leads to asking whether there are any similarities or parallels to be found now, in this country, about which we need to be concerned. Just raising the question may sound outrageous but I can't find any other way to describe the assignment.

I have made every effort to be as even-handed as possible in what I have to say despite having my own opinions. Nevertheless, facts versus lies have to be given due attention. (Exaggerations can be dangerous also.)

An example of a current hot issue which has dominated the news ever since February 4th when President Trump issued an executive order focused on travelers from seven primarily Muslim countries, and the broader issue of refugees to the U.S. This has led to direct conflict within several parts of our government – the presidency, state Attorney-General offices, the U.S. court system – along with a joint court filing of protest from more than 100 of America's biggest technology companies. (I will give this closer attention further on.)

Because of the second part of the title I want to say that I do not intend to argue that President Trump is a second Hitler or even a potential Hitler. Nor was that ever the intention of the lecture. Despite quite a number of similarities in the two men a closer look highlights very important distinctions. We, as responsible citizens with different concerns and perspectives, should not avoid asking questions about some of Mr. Trump's statements and President Trump's actions. And we need to consider responses and reactions from experienced observers, scholars, and professionals in the field of government. Also, the public's responses – as divided as the election count was – require attention as well.

What background do I bring to this assignment? The Holocaust with its

¹ An email I received from a friend sums up the reply to the question much more briefly: "Appease the Christians, blame another religion, isolate with a wall, build up the military, fill your cabinet with generals, quietly make the rich richer, and promise the angry fading base that their time has come again. That play book was written in Europe in the '30s. 'Those who forget the lessons of the past are bound to repeat them'."

unique impact on so much history, ethics, and religion, along with European and American history in general, are areas in which I have been involved for a good many years.² And I have closely followed the election and the recent weeks of Trump's presidency in as many ways as possible. (No one could say that there has not been enough coverage! – though many will say that the coverage has not been even-handed.) Some striking features demand consideration.

We begin then with questions: What differences, and what similarities or parallels, can we see in the two different time periods—the 1920s to (let's say) 1936, and the present - 2015 to 2017? What are the differences or similarities in the behavior or words of Hitler and Trump as candidates for office? What are the differences or similarities in the actions taken by the winning candidate? What differences or similarities do we see in the character and characteristic of the two? And what differences or similarities do we find in the two nations in their own time periods?

Remember that we are looking at the early years of Hitler's candidacy and office holding – and not at the later years. Even so, knowing the end results as we do, we cannot help but discern clues pointing toward what would follow. Hence we need to consider the possible consequences of our president's current actions.

In both of the election periods radical differences are to be found in the political and economic situations of the two nations and peoples – the earlier Germany and that of the present United States, and the opinions and consequent actions within those two national populations. The way those differences are manifested will be noticeably distinctive. In our own time there has been no destruction of property to speak of, whereas it was enormous in Germany. And the amount of physical abuse used against those protesting against candidate Trump at campaign events was minimal, especially when compared to the Nazis' all-too-frequent violent attacks on others during electoral campaigns (or even at other times).

Let's note some immediate elements which fit both cases:

- We find each country holding many nationally divisive points of view.
- Each had a very heated and disruptive election period; though in Germany there were actually two elections within one year.
- Each election had a leading candidate possessing a strong ego, with pre-determined goals that would require overturning many established systems, and the readiness to set about accomplishing those goals quickly.

Other common aspects of the two situations also come to mind:

- Hitler's use of the then-new means of reaching a wide public thru radio, film, and mass gatherings – to an extent not then utilized by most political figures.

² A long list of publications can be found in Lehigh University Special Collections.

Trump's daily and frequent use of the internet keep him in constant touch with the public, while television puts him in everyone's home.

- Hitler's high-powered and often raging speeches both spoke about and created fears and hate in the public by specifically identifying, over and over, the dangerous outsiders. Trump's repeated singling out of Muslims as persons of concern has led to fears among Latinos, African-Americans, or those in the LGBT community, as it has given strength and apparent support to hate which too many others already hold. (During the electoral campaign Trump also consistently denigrated and insulted fellow Republican candidates.)

At the same time Trump's insistence that working class Americans have been too long ignored gratifies them and give them hope; just as many saw Hitler doing for them in his early years

- Hitler not only tolerated but was encouraging of his followers' physical attacks on Jews and Communists or any who appeared to question his views. During the 2015-16 election campaign Trump said nothing regarding his followers' attacks on dissenters and did not change the language which appeared to encourage it.

After making these comparisons I must insist at once that there is absolutely NO indication or evidence that candidate or President Trump has any murderous intentions. However, he definitely does have widely-expressed exclusionary intentions. But please note, and I insist: He is not an antisemite.

In Hitler's early politically active years was there any evidence of murderous intentions? He was clearly determined to rid the country of Jews because he was convinced that they were devilish, even sub-human. He would do everything possible to ensure that the German people understood that. Yet there is no evidence that he, at that time, foresaw killing squads or death camps. However he did attract followers who were quite ready to utilize violence to achieve what they and he wanted.³ (We know that later on he was the one to order the mass murders, in which he then included Gypsies/Romanos.)

Going a bit beyond the years I set out to cover, we need to take note of another of his actions: In 1939 he initiated a program to kill – though he said “mercifully” kill or “euthanize” – all Germans who were useless: the mentally

³ The term “final solution” meaning mass murder was not used among the Nazis until July 31, 1941, when Heinrich Göring used it in a memo commissioning Reinhard Heydrich to set up the overall organizational plan for the coming attack on the Soviet Union with its huge Jewish population. (Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust, Revised Edition*, pp. 220,224; 2001) Heydrich put Adolf Eichmann in charge of arresting and deporting Jews to the death camps which were to be established in Poland with its even larger number of Jews and strong antisemitism. Eichmann was all too ready to handle this task with “all the fanaticism that an old Nazi would expect of himself” (as he said at his trial in Jerusalem in 1961. (p. 227)

retarded, chronically ill, physically disabled, or social misfits – in order to cancel the financial burden of caring for them, but, more important, in order to produce a superior German race. These “useless” German subjects were killed by gas, while living in public institutions established to care for them. In 1941, as the program finally became known, the public and the clergy reacted against it (the only such protest). The protesters thought they had succeeded in stopping the program, but these killings quietly continued through the war years until approximately 100,000 were killed in this way. We need to acknowledge that the idea of euthanizing persons considered defective already in American and British scientific communities. Furthermore, we now know that the practice was secretly used in some American institutions. The idea offered the slippery slope to its use.

We need to look back almost 100 years to the conclusion of World War I in order to examine the situation in which Hitler made his political appearance. German armed forces had been on French and Belgian territory for almost the entire four years of that war. And Germany’s devastating submarine warfare by 1917 had almost brought Britain to capitulate – until American forces entered the war and changed the balance of power.

By late 1918, though German forces still were on their enemies’ territories, the German Generals “desperately urged” that an armistice be signed. They were a key force in setting up a German republic (helped by the Kaiser’s abdication) because they believed that better peace terms could be secured from the Allies if the country were seen to be a remade Germany. But the peace treaty which the Allies presented as an ultimatum to the Germans in May 1919 put all the responsibility for the war’s carnage on the now defeated German nation; it took away its Alsace-Lorraine area, some land in the East and its overseas colonies; it restricted the size of its Army and Navy; it denied its requested unification with Austria; and it loaded Germany with an enormous financial debt (the amount of which was not yet determined).

Germany’s first democratic government, elected in early 1919, was composed of 40% Social Democrats along with the Catholic Center party and a small Democratic party.⁴ That working majority unfortunately did not survive the early 1920 election and was never regained, which made any of the governments’ coping with the country’s many problems all but impossible, especially with the imposed financial payments totaling \$33 billion.

In spite of the new parliamentary government there was almost no change in the actual functioning of the governmental bureaucracies, the personnel of the courts, nor in the economy or the society, since the aristocracy and the industrialists maintained their previous positions. Consequently, the fate of the

⁴ It had some German Jewish ministers.

Weimar Republic is often seen as “foreordained.”

Germany’s industries set out to produce goods for export. But the 1923 government printed so much new paper money that it led to massive inflation in which the currency became all but worthless. Numerous extremist parties on the left and the right ensured constant political agitation throughout the decade. When the American stock market crashed in late 1929 and its economy collapsed, so did the rest of the capitalist world. Germany found it impossible to pay its debts. With the Great Depression of the 1930s, and other countries imposing import taxes on Germany’s products, the German peoples’ despair offered extremists the perfect situation in which to take power.

During all of this period the German people never believed that they had been defeated militarily. Rather they were convinced that there had been a deliberate betrayal of their Kaiser’s government and its army by insidious elements which “stabbed Germany in the back.”⁵ This helped open the doors to angry political agitation which latched onto the existing extreme antisemitism of the earlier Conservative Party and built on the many centuries of European anti-Judaism and antisemitism. It was all too easy for antisemites and political opportunists to declare that Jewry was the primary, subversive, insidious, stabbing element. It did not help that Jews had only been allowed to become full citizens since 1871 when the various German states and principalities had unified into a single nation. (Even at that time ultra-conservative parties labeled Jews as inside enemies.)

Adolf Hitler, who had fought and been gassed and badly wounded in World War I and who bitterly rejected Germany’s military defeat, began searching for a way to create a new hierarchical government which would be decidedly averse to equality and democracy. The German Workers Party⁶ caught his attention and he quickly took over its leadership. He designed the Party’s eye-catching banner with its black swastika on a white circle against a bright red background, and wrote much of its 1920 25-point program. The Party was strongest in Bavaria where his speeches began to gather crowds, particularly of veterans and others equally dissatisfied who became convinced that no other party would take the necessary actions.

⁵ After the armistice was signed, General Ludendorff told a German parliamentary committee that a British general said to him that the German army had not been defeated by an external enemy but by an internal enemy. Ludendorff, a violent anti-semitic, identified that enemy as the Democrats, the Catholic Center party, the Socialists, and the Jews. He soon became an ally of the emerging Nazi party. (Bauer, p. 83)

⁶ The name was soon changed to the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP),

Remember that we are looking back at this time not only to learn about it but to see if there are any similarities to our time and anything we need to be especially concerned about.

Hitler's 1920 program already pointedly stated that only those of German blood could be citizens or members of the nation: that is, Jews were to be excluded. Only German citizens could vote: again not Jews. Furthermore, "all non-German immigration must be prevented" and all non-Germans who entered Germany after 2 August 1914 would be required to leave the country. Thus were tens of thousands of Poles and Polish Jews in Germany already targeted.⁷ And an increasing number of German citizens were either already viewing, or began viewing, their Jewish fellow-citizens as an unwelcome, foreign, and threatening element, and were only too eager to take over their jobs or businesses. Furthermore, during those years members of Hitler's party were already using a great deal of violence against Jewish citizens, murdering, and destroying property.

Hitler's attempt to seize power in Munich in 1923 did not succeed and he spent nine months in prison (where he wrote *Mein Kampf - My Struggle*). Over that decade the Party continued its virulent campaign, but its electoral numbers actually declined. Only in 1932, in the midst of a great many conflicting circumstances, was the Nazi Party, along with another ultra-conservative party, finally called on by President von Hindenburg to form a government. The President was sure that Hitler could be safely contained.

An outside event the following year may have been all-determinative of the future when on February 27, 1933 the Reichstag (Germany's legislative building) was burned down.⁸ The very next day Hitler persuaded President von Hindenburg to issue a decree to Protect the People and the State. It suspended constitutional guarantees of personal liberty, free expression of opinion – including that of the press, and the right of assembly. Telephone, telegraph, and postal privacy was no longer guaranteed, and home searches or confiscation of property could be undertaken. On March 5th, 1933 – eight days later, and a day of widespread terror – a new election was held with the Communist party removed from the ballot. Though the results did not give the Nazi Party a majority, with the support of other rightists Hitler was able just 18 days later (March 23rd) to get the legislature to do something unbelievable: to end the legislature's own power.

⁷ Even before the Nazis took political power, the Foreign Ministry had defended the Party's antisemitism. Other non-Germans would also in time be subjected to ouster or prison camps. (Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, p. 26, 1997)

⁸ The Nazis initially accused a Dutch anarchist, but then laid the blame on the Communists.

to pass laws.⁹ Thus the Nazi dictatorship was brought into being by a vote.¹⁰

Germany's economy began to improve thanks to new programs of vast public works, rearmament, and elimination of unemployment (though combined with lowered wages).

In the previous year, 1932, when Hitler was first named chancellor, he believed that destroying the Jewish role in the economy too quickly in the midst of the Great Depression would do more damage than the country could sustain just then. Hence only a one day boycott of Jewish businesses was allowed (in order to satisfy Party followers who had been agitating for such a boycott). He believed that a long-term boycott would too extensively damage the national economy, and would put too many non-Jews out of work. Actually the one day boycott was of almost no interest to most Germans.

Hitler's restraint did not last long. A year later, in April 1933, for the very first time since 1871 legal discrimination against Jews was put in place: A law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service required that any of the two million employees who were of non-Aryan origin must "retire." This so-called "Aryan Paragraph" specifically applied to anyone descended from even one non-Aryan, especially Jewish, parent or grandparent.¹¹ Though relatively few Jews were in the civil service at that time, the law established the principle which would be the center of all subsequent legislation.

After the first anti-Jewish law was in place the government quickly moved to pass additional laws prohibiting Jews, from all sorts of work – as lawyers, judges, physicians, teachers, artists, musicians, newspaper editors, etc. (although for a few years they could still engage in these activities within the Jewish community itself. Also at that time Jews who had fought in World War I were excluded from some of the laws.) Clearly Hitler's government was focused on eliminating Jews and Jewish influence from all spheres of the nation's life. The next step was a law of Naturalization which excluded Jews from becoming citizens; and the citizenship of relatively recent Jewish immigrants was revoked.¹²

⁹ Notice the emotive words used in naming the law: "for Removing the Distress of People and Reich."

¹⁰ On July 14 a law declared the Nazi party as the only legal party, and on Dec. 1, 1933 the unity of the Party and the State was officially decreed. (Bauer, 102)

¹¹ The law did not explain what "non-Aryan" meant. Party officials spent a couple of years struggling with the definition and how to determine who was non-Aryan; and both "first-degree" and "second-degree" non-Aryan identities were specified on a variety of bases. When the Third Reich secured control over other nations and their people, there was less fussiness about trying to determine the degree of Jewishness of a person.

¹² A law on Over-crowding in Schools and Universities restricted the number of Jews who could attend either the local schools or universities.

These laws were part of the “enlightening” or teaching process, making sure that the entire German public fully understood that the “Jewish question” made it necessary for everyone to recognize that the “national community” was a “community of blood.” Everyone must learn to think racially.¹³

1935 witnessed the destruction of many Jewish shops, and numerous physical attacks on Jews in full view of the public on Berlin’s main street, *Kurfürstendamm*. Then in mid-September on Hitler’s direct order the most important next set of laws was issued from Nuremberg – stripping citizenship from all Jews; forbidding marriage between Jews and Germans; making all such existing marriages invalid; forbidding extra-marital relations between Jews and those of German blood; and forbidding Jewish households to employ German female subjects under 45 years of age. (Nor were Jews allowed to display the Reich flag, though they could display so-called “Jewish colors”). In November of 1935 a decree finally defined who was a Jew, and who was of “mixed blood” (*Mischlinge*). Even a person only married to a Jew was deemed to be a Jew. And all of these persons were now only second class residents of a country no longer theirs, and were subject to whatever restrictive laws Hitler’s government enacted.

How did German Jews react to all of this? With puzzlement, with growing disbelief, with unrealistically hopeful expectations that Hitler would moderate once he gained the control he wanted. Most never sensed in time the long-term implications of these early measures, although some who had the financial means did leave the country in the early years. However many did not go far enough and fell into Nazi hands again as German power engulfed most of Europe.¹⁴ Most German Jews simply accepted their new status as if fated. Lest we judge them as stupid we need to recognize that almost no country would accept Jewish immigrants!

One person who perceived the reality of German Jewry’s future was a son of an Orthodox Jew, George Solmssen, a spokesman for the Deutsche Bank. On April 9, 1933 he wrote to the president of the Bank’s board:

“I am afraid that we are merely at the beginning of a process aiming, purposefully and according to a well-prepared plan, at the economic and moral annihilation of all members, without any distinctions, of the Jewish race living in Germany. The total passivity of those classes of the population that belong to the National Socialist Party, the absence of all

¹³ Léon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate* (1951).

¹⁴ For example, Anne Frank’s family only went as far as the Netherlands. Jews whose jobs did not appear transferable to another country, or who despaired of learning another language felt they had no choice but to remain and weather the storm.

feelings of solidarity becoming apparent among those who until now worked shoulder to shoulder with Jewish colleagues, the increasingly more obvious desire to take personal advantage of vacated positions, the hushing up of the disgrace and the shame disastrously inflicted upon people who, although innocent, witness the destruction of their honor and their existence from one day to the next – all of this indicates a situation so hopeless that it would be wrong not to face it squarely without any attempt at prettification.”¹⁵

How right he was! Most Jews, even very intelligent ones, were unrealistic in their expectations. For example, in February 1933 Rabbi Martin Buber wrote to a friend that “only if power shifted” to the National Socialists could anti-Jewish legislation be passed, and that “can hardly to be expected.” And yet in just a few weeks exactly that happened. (Remember all the polls in 2016 which showed that Mr. Trump didn’t stand a chance of winning?) All of this happened so rapidly that it is difficult for us to follow developments, no less for them to do so. In no time at all Hitler created not only a police state but a criminal state. And then by changing the laws and the courts he turned a criminal state into a legal state. Next he undermined, and then utilized, the religious and academic institutions for his own purposes. Though they were supposedly the institutions that would ensure the nation’s morality, they offered almost no resistance, and indeed gave considerable support, to the government’s actions. (We need to remember that.)

Meanwhile a great deal of violence was being carried out against Jews in various places and in a variety of situations, steadily becoming more and more “common-place.” March 20, 1933 was the establishment of the first concentration camp, at Dachau, which initially imprisoned Communists. With the camps and frequent use of the death penalty, not to mention random street killings, Hitler created a “rule of fear.”

The year 1936 witnessed some let-up in the anti-Jewish actions as Germany hosted both the summer and winter Olympics.¹⁶ Of course all the public signs which revealed discrimination were removed in order to deceive international visitors.

In the prior year, 1935, Hitler announced to Party leaders that war would be launched in four years, following proper preparations, and gave Hermann Göring responsibility for carrying out his outlined plan. There were no comments or

¹⁵ Friedländer, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁶ Hitler did everything possible to ensure that German athletes (no Jews) would win the medals, which in a large measure they did. He was visibly disturbed when the African-American Jesse Owens won so many gold medals, and when the rowing team from the state of Washington took gold. (Read Daniel James Brown’s *The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.*)

questions. Germany and its Aryan race would claim its rightful domination over Europe, and thus the world. In words that revealed his obsessive view of Jews he added that during those years Jews would have to be eliminated (he did not say “killed”) or else they “would eliminate the German people.”¹⁷ (Yet remember their small numbers and their powerlessness!)

Though 1936 was intended to be my cut-off date we need to give brief attention to two other key events before war¹⁸ began in 1939: The first was the 1938 peaceful takeover and absorption of Austria with great jubilation shown by its majority population. Since this added another 200,000 Jews who had to be dealt with, Adolf Eichmann quickly initiated this with an excess of brutality and humiliation. The second happening came to be called *Krystallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass. It was the last act of unendorsed wholesale violence against German and Austrian Jewish communities, carried out under Goebbels explicit direction by Storm Troopers and thousands of loyal supporters on the night of November 9/10, 1939. Synagogues, shops, and apartments were burned, looted, or demolished, and 91 Jews were reported killed. Himmler and Heydrich quickly reasserted control, but continued the all-too useful assault, ordering SS units and thousands of loyal supporters to confiscate Jewish archives and property, to arrest 26,000 Jewish men and send them to concentration camps.¹⁹

All of this is all but incomprehensible to us and in such stark contrast to our situation that the relationship of the two parts asked in the title of this talk may seem ridiculous or perhaps even outrageous. So why ask it?

Has Donald Trump asked for any similar legislation? NO. Is there any basis for thinking he might do so? NO. However, he certainly has spoken negatively about Muslims and illegal immigrants. And we will need to examine this.

That is why we need to look further at any further similarities in Hitler’s and Trump’s words and actions. Are there some which may give us legitimate

¹⁷ Bauer, p. 113.

¹⁸ The war gave Germany access to Jews living in Poland and the Soviet Union, the largest Jewish communities of Europe. And it was there, under cover of the war, that Hitler developed his “Final Solution” of the Jewish problem, carried out by death camps, special killing squads, and additional help from Army units. And with little information about it reaching the West.

¹⁹ In order to be released Jews had to pay huge sums, and to pledge to leave the country within two weeks. That was easily ordered, but almost impossible for Jews to fulfill as practically no country was opening its closed borders. ***Hitler also labeled Poles and Slavic people – and Blacks -- as “less human” who after September 1939 he would more or less enslave. Gypsies were singled out for killing.***

concerns? Or are there some positive aspects to some of Trump's proposals? How much of the answers to these questions depend on how the actions are utilized?

- Trump certainly exhibits a similar controlling personality to Hitler; each must be in charge, and must not be thwarted. (But Trump would not order murder.)

- Absolutist views undergird and direct their actions, and offer little room for compromise.

- The ability to focus attention on themselves and their ideas at all times is demonstrated by both Trump and Hitler. In this way each is able to dominate the national agenda.

- Each utilizes language that generates strong emotional response, both positive and negative. But the words can also be falsehoods asserted with an authority that persuades.

- Each is able to direct public attention onto a particular issue with his own assured solution. (Many individuals wish for this ability and those who have it frequently use it in worthwhile causes.)

- Each of the men claims superior insight with which he can resolve national ills. (But don't many political leaders assert such claims?) Just think of films of Hitler speaking to enormous and enthralled crowds. Only he and his Party or government would successfully uncover the internal enemies and prevent them from harming the nation. Then think of President Trump's words at his inauguration as he described this nation's present condition in starkly negative, but unforgettable, terms – "in a state of carnage," with "rusted out factories like tombstones," women and children "trapped in poverty in inner cities," schools that leave our students "deprived of all knowledge," crime, and gangs, and drugs that steal "too many lives and rob our country of so much potential", other countries which "steal our companies and destroy our jobs." He and the Republican Congress promise to correct all of this. Hitler made similar promises.

- Perhaps most important of all, and most difficult to argue against or discourage: by combining many of the elements I've just listed with personality and promised corrective actions, each of these leaders arouse enormous hope and enthusiasm in his audiences. Remember how on January 26 Trump enthused to the gathered Senate and House members: "think of everything we can achieve! . . . the great and lasting change" we can accomplish! (How many clergy and counselors also wish to be able to do this!)

Are there other substantive elements of comparison to be seen in words or actions?

Hitler's only real concern was the wealth, welfare, racial health, power of the Germanic people, along with the expansion of their country. The nation would take its rightful place in the world. And he would see all of that accomplished.

President Trump insists firmly and repeatedly that his only real concern is the United States and its people's well-being. However he does not speak of "racial health" or an enlarged territory. The President shows little respect or concern for the European Union²⁰ even though it emerged out of the devastation of World War II as a major step to prevent the repeat of another such conflict. The EU has been the bedrock of American-European relations for decades, and a staple of both American and Western Europe's security policy with regard to the Soviet Union (now renamed Russia). Why does the President show it such disdain? Does he think it does not benefit the United States? His show of empathy for Britain's recent separation from the European Union, and his expressed regard for France's rightist nationalistic party *Le Pen* demonstrate a disquieting antagonism.

A recent event raised unanticipated concern when the President spoke belligerently to the prime minister of Australia, a long-term ally. Trump was angry about President Obama's agreement to accept some 1250 refugees from Pacific Islands from Australian camps, and we might say he "took it out" on Turnbull. He would not talk about any other issue and abruptly cut off the phone call.

Action to rid their countries of unwanted resident foreigners is another matter on which both men focused. Hitler decided that all non-Germans must leave the country. In his first action he ordered that all Poles and Polish Jews be rounded up and dumped across the Polish borders. Then many other foreigners were frightened into leaving or were put in prison camps. Trump insists that tens of thousands of illegal immigrants, and their children (mostly from Central America or Mexico) be forcibly deported. And a wall on our border with Mexico will be built to keep them out.

One of Hitler's abilities was his masterful sense of when he could take a bold step without activating either internal or foreign opposition: as when he broke the terms of the Versailles Treaty regarding the Alsace-Lorraine territory, when he remilitarized the Rhineland, when he acted to enlarge Germany's territory without war by acquiring the Sudeten border area of Czechoslovakia (with the acquiescence of Britain and France), or when he followed this by the quiet takeover of Austria.

Has Trump this same sense of the right time?

Many people think this is the right time. It's the time to put America first, and to watch out for Americans. We need to secure our borders and our people's safety, and do all we can to keep out terrorists by screening more thoroughly those who enter the country. We can't take care of the world, though some

²⁰ However, on February 6 he changed his position on NATO. While previously he had questioned the NATO military alliance with European nations, on Feb. 5 he gave it his strong support.

recognize that there are people in bad situations who need to be helped. Safety Zones need to be created. But the needed help for refugees ought to be done in some other way than bringing them here. The U.S “can’t be the world’s social security.” Some approve in general of the President’s recent actions but think he might have accomplished his goal in some other and better way. At the same time the President has many staunch supporters who approve of everything he says and everything he does. As one put it: “He is unafraid,” and is “going ahead like a locomotive.” He is fulfilling his campaign promises.

The Republican majority in Congress is essentially totally supportive despite some voiced criticisms regarding the ways in which the President has gone about things. Definite differences about Trump’s positive attitude toward Vladimir Putin and Russia have been expressed by congressional Republicans. Nor have all have been satisfied by the way he has handled some issues. I think some critical opposition may arise even within his party at some point. But right now there is no interest in calling a halt to its opportunity to accomplish the goals which the Republican party and president have set.

Let’s take a more intensive look at the issue I mentioned as I began, an issue that is bringing about much judicial action and public attention. While Trump was campaigning he pledged to ban Muslims from this country. Then, in office, on January 27 he issued an executive order stopping all travel from seven Muslim countries for 90 days. Any travelers from three additional primarily Muslim countries which were not included in the “stop travel” order – Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Afghanistan¹⁹ – were told they also would face “extreme vetting.” And all refugees (from anywhere), including those already being processed, were put on hold for 120 days. On February 3 the Attorneys-General of Washington and Minnesota met the executive order with a court suit claiming it was causing significant harm to their residents, and also requiring their states to illegally discriminate on the basis of national origin and/or religion. In this way the order rescinds the states’ historic protection of both civil rights and religious liberty. That same day U.S. District Court Judge Robart in Seattle ordered a stay on the executive order, requiring that its enforcement be suspended until he can make a final decision. This reopened the door for these people.

Government lawyers argued that Congress has given the president authority to make decisions regarding national security, including the admission of immigrants; therefore, he has the legal right to use that power to prevent terrorists from gaining entry.

¹⁹ Veterans who had benefitted immensely from the help of native Afghans are irate that these men (and their families) are being blocked from entering this country. They had put their lives in danger by helping the Americans, and vets want to help them build new and safe lives here.

Two days later more than 100 high tech companies²⁰ (mainly based in the Silicon Valley) issued a public statement which strongly opposed the President's order, and argued that Trump's action would threaten their industries, which need expert workers from overseas. Without this ability the companies would have to move some operations abroad. In other words, at present they are doing exactly what Trump campaigned for – keeping American industries in this country to improve its economy and provide employment. Thus his current action is contradictory to his previous stance.²¹ Subsequently three U.S. judges from the 9th U.S. Court of Appeals said the federal government had not shown an urgent need to impose the order immediately, and that Robart's ruling should remain in effect until the Circuit Judge completes examining the executive order. Against the federal argument that the courts have no right to review the president's executive order the appellate court replied that the federal courts regularly review – even in times of armed conflict – the constitutionality of such executive orders, and even invalidate them.²²

Additional court actions are in process. The President has lashed out, as is his style, against the courts. It is difficult to say just how long a resolution of the problem may take.

In the January 30, 2017 issue of *The New Yorker* Judith Thurman wrote about a phone interview with Philip Roth concerning his 2004 novel *The Plot Against America*. Roth had reimagined the United States between June 1940 and October 1942 as a time after President Roosevelt had been defeated for reelection by Charles Lindbergh. President Lindbergh expressed his admiration for the German dictator, thus enabling xenophobic Americans to act in various ways; Germany interfered in U.S. elections; and it is believed that President Lindbergh was then blackmailed by Germany. In that imagined situation Jews living in Newark were frightened about their president yet tried to deny their alarm.

Roth said he was not writing as an alarmist; he was just trying to use his imagination: What if this country had been anything like Hitler's Germany; how would a Jewish family, such as his own, have been treated? After all, that decade

²⁰ Apple, Google, Microsoft, eBay, Netflix, Facebook, and Twitter are signers.

²¹ What is the connection or comparison with Hitler? He would not allow non-German immigrants entry, and he deported tens of thousands of them.

²² President Trump's nominee to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch, reportedly told a Democratic Senator from Connecticut that he was troubled and disheartened by the "demoralizing and abhorrent comments" made by President Trump regarding the judiciary.

in the U.S. was in fact “pointedly antisemitic.” Also he was trying to point out that what the Jews of Germany experienced under Hitler might have been experienced here under some similar kinds of circumstances.

When Roth was asked whether he believed we are now living with those circumstances, Roth did not answer that directly. He said he sees the President as a “con artist.” as well as “ignorant of government, of history, of science, of philosophy, of art; incapable of expressing or recognizing subtlety or nuance, destitute of all decency, and wielding a vocabulary of seventy-seven words.” But then Roth added a more “terrifying” thought: that Trump makes “any and everything possible, including . . . nuclear catastrophe.”

Even without considering such a possibility I am convinced that we should pay close attention to the President’s words and what they may indicate regarding possible actions. Since the President has filled his Cabinet with like-minded individuals, and has a Republican majority Congress, there is little reason to find much opposition there. So we need to be not silent observers, but careful followers of events. Lawful opposition is not only the nature of our democracy but often is a political necessity.

We are still left with unanswered questions: Will the Republican-dominated Congress consistently support the President and his wishes? Will the various government Departments accede to his executive orders? Will his Cabinet members always agree with his views? (At the Senate and House interrogations of his Cabinet nominees some said openly that they differ with the President on some matters.) What impact will mass public protests have?

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