

Trump is Not the Only Problem; Solutions for an Unfair World

BY Dr. Joost Smiers



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One of his last books, written together with Pieter Pekelharing and John Huige, is *Breaking Up Megacorporations, Radicalize Competition Policy, Abolish Patents and Copyrights, Stop Corporate Crime*. His last book is an essay entitled *Trump is not the only problem...Solutions for an unfair world*. Joost Smiers is currently preparing a book on corporate impunity and what to do about it on a global scale. The other book he is working on concerns roaming noise levels and other undesired sounds, and to whom belongs the public space. Joost lives in Amsterdam, on one of the canals in a house dating back to around 1600.

After November 8, 2016, I have occasionally thought that our governments should recall their ambassadors from the United States, for consultation as it is called; I'd rather say for consideration. That recall did of course not happen, but consideration is more than ever necessary. After more than one year it is abundantly clear that Donald Trump's government has not left relations within the US and the rest of the world untouched. Obviously, US citizens must set their own course, but as residents of all corners of the world we have to consider what this Trump is doing. Let me mention in this essay a few points that we, as non-Americans, have to think about. What can we still expect, what have we already seen, how did that affect us, and how can we respond appropriately?

The election of Trump forces us, more than ever, to consider some fundamental issues. At the same time we should not be afraid to formulate ambitious solutions. It is still possible to build a civilized, human, just and ecologically sustainable world. We need radical proposals for that.

I do not start with Trump – no matter how much we are talking about him. I want to focus first on some topics which form the core of the unrest that is raging around the world. They contain a lot of explosive material. That is the unmistakable fact that the unrestrained economic and cultural globalization of the last decades has yielded relatively few winners, but an enormous amount of losers. If we see "*simplifying* right-wing currents" playing into this, the question arises why the left, with some exceptions, has joined so easily in the neoliberal discourse about the blessings of global free trade, deregulation, privatization and the degradation of the individual and collective protection of citizen rights, which had been established over the decades.

What is happening now is that the current, unrestrained economic globalization is meeting with more and more resistance. But it's not clear how we can get rid of it. The big question for now is which economic conditions we find just, human and efficient. That means we need to make radical choices. Global, regional and bilateral trade treaties must be recalibrated. At the moment the purpose of these treaties is to give businesses and financial institutions the greatest possible freedom of action. But what about protecting the environment, pursuing social justice, enforcing decent working conditions, and finally ending tax evasion and tax fraud?

When rewriting and renegotiating trade agreements between countries, within regions and at a global level, these types of values must have priority. But that is not enough: too big and too powerful, and therefore democratically uncontrollable mega-businesses must be substantially reduced in size, and the intellectual property rights system that gives them so much power and privatizes our jointly-built knowledge and creativity must be torn down.

A next issue we are emphatically required to consider is something horrible: the threat of war. Weren't we supposed to have peace after the Cold War? Forget it. The arms race is in full swing. After 1989, we thought NATO would be an unnecessary organization, but it gradually became an instrument that has advanced to the borders of Russia. Was that a prudent thing to do? Now that Trump has announced that he does not want to pay any longer for the defense of Western Europe, and that he intends to spend a lot more on armaments for the US, we have to think suddenly about what kind of army we want to have. The choice is clear: Europe should invest heavily in many and – above all – new, technologically ingenious weapons, *or* we should pay more attention to the organization of

disarmament conferences and weapon reductions. For the sake of clarity, I do not want to suggest that an army in itself is an unnecessary luxury; however, the question is what kind of army that should be. In addition, we must fear that the motto of years ago, "All nuclear weapons should be removed from the face of the earth," will be more to the point than ever.

After these major issues, I focus on Trump. What does he harbor for the world and how should we respond? It is problematic that the US have always pretended to be a luminous example of what real democracy is. But then, the emperor is naked. We are even wondering if the presidential elections of 2016 were fraught with fraud. The trumpeting about of lies and half truths is the order of the day. The press, the judicial apparatus, the intelligence services and officials of various government departments are depicted as enemies of the people. *Shame!!!!* As a result, the foundations needed for the good and fair functioning of the state are dismantled, which also seems to have been the intention of Trump's former chief advisor Steve Bannon. Even for those who had not seen, before the election, that Trump is a man with totalitarian tendencies, it cannot be a mystery anymore: he really is, and more than that.

The most disturbing fact is that we have to fear that this hateful and warlike president is heading towards some form of coup. It is sometimes suggested that the institutions in the US are strong enough to ensure this will not happen. But unfortunately it can happen if the people turn against those institutions. Moreover, the institutions are only as strong as the persons which carry them. In that regard the repulsive and opportunist behavior of many Republicans does not seem to be hopeful. All this promises little good for the rest of the world.

All in all, I suppose that we are confronted by a major challenge. It is of the utmost urgency that the simplifying right and the veritable left will talk to each other, despite all mutual denunciations of the past. Why this bold proposal? The choice we are facing is the following: either we continue on the path of unrestrained and uncontrolled economic, social and cultural globalization, or we understand that we, as citizens, are losing our grip on our living conditions through this ever-changing globalization, and that something needs to be done. The latter is one of the important messages that the simplifying right is taking out on the road.

Precisely about that excessive globalization a conversation is possible with the veritable left. Why do I prefer to talk about the simplifying right and not about the extreme right or the populist right? Whoever argues that the world in which we live has become too complex is not an extremist and not a populist either. But he or she might be simplifying, because simply calling for protectionism, the closing of borders and the setting off of trade wars is not the solution. That shows naivety about the nature of the problems. The contribution to

this conversation from the veritable left may be that the economic and financial power of large and powerful companies and financial institutions must be addressed.

There are nearly two hundred countries in the world. Most of them have periodic elections, or something that looks like that. The results of these - as far as I follow them - can make me happy or sad, but even in countries that enjoy my special attention the elections have never put my life on its head. Still that has been the case now, with the arrival of Trump. I reached maturity in a time of mutual trust and great expectations - expectations about equality, respect for others, concern for the climate - without being afflicted with the idea that a particular country or people is better than any other.

My friends and I, and all the people that have suffered a similar shock as a result of Trump's election, must find our way in a hard and dangerous world that we are not familiar with, but our values have remained unchanged. Hence this essay: an attempt to make the most of it.

Joost Smiers' entire essay, entitled 'Trump is Not the Only Problem; Solutions for an Unfair World' can be accessed in full [here](#).

This article was written in 2018.

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