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Mussolini or Nixon? Don't Bother Voting. Prepare to Resist

William Gillis

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The next President of the United States will be one of the worst. If September 11th was a gunshot that allowed the Bush Administration to take off sprinting, the Obama administration grabbed the baton and charged forward even faster. No one spends years pursuing political power only to walk into the Oval Office and suddenly decide to surrender and abolish their power. The exchange of the executive office between Republicans and Democrats is just the steady ratchet of authoritarianism — each side stamping out pockets of freedom that their predecessor's didn't.

And yet this election poses a situation even more dire than usual. Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton have the most extreme unfavorability ratings of any major candidate in modern times.

In some respects the apocalyptic language widely used to describe both candidates risks obscuring how much of a continuation their administrations will be. Both will likely step up the US government's attacks upon the internet. Both will likely work to

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take guns out of the hands of people of color. Both will likely give the police and the military a pass, and suppress investigations into abuses during the Bush and Obama years. Both will level the power of the state against some capitalists while empowering, condoning and privileging others. Both will protect their cronies and punish others. Both will be profoundly secretive and capricious towards whistleblowers, journalists, and pundits.

And yet it does mean something when Trump and Clinton are the nominees despite overwhelming dislike. What this election poses is something of a break — a stark unveiling of just how unnecessary the pretense of democratic support really is. The major parties are free to elect some of the most vile monsters imaginable and one of them will still end up president. America's politicians have learned that they can be hated and still rule.

This election is a contest between a Mussolini and a Nixon. Both representatives of brazen authoritarianism, albeit in different flavors and with different temperaments.

Clinton is openly a Nixon, hungry for power and recognition, enmeshing herself at the center of the establishment's corrupt webs. She is capricious and paranoid about dissent, pandering to demographic interest groups. The sort of woman who reacts with shocked consternation that anyone would object to her Christmases with the war criminal Henry Kissinger. A Clinton administration would mean the continuation of an aggressive foreign policy and the probable deaths of hundreds of thousands.

Trump is a Mussolini, a fatuous opportunist who sees the world in the most simple zero-sum terms and is unencumbered by inherited inhibitions. A Trump presidency would be backed by open thuggery in the streets from his most vile supporters, with a massive expansion of the state's coercive powers accompanying it. Meanwhile millions of people of color will likely face a wave of open repression not seen since the Japanese Internment Camps. Overseas, he may shed less blood than Clinton, or escalate violence to unfathomable heights. What is absolutely without question

is that Trump will take dramatic steps to outlaw free speech, increasing the severity of libel laws and aggressively punishing and sanctioning the press.

In historic moments like these there's an urge to dwell on the frantic energy, the magic of adrenaline and possibility. Many people laugh with a nervous kind of ecstatic delight during a natural disaster. It can feel freeing to suddenly witness the norms and conventions of the world falling away.

Strongmen like Trump use this revolutionary rush. For their followers it provides a promise of the power to change the world — to be part of unleashing something that is potent and “new”. For the rest it provides a numbing paralytic — our heads spin as we sit in place trying to make sense of the developments passing us by. We write a thousand think-pieces pouring over the chicken bones to read faint insights into who is going to win. Not a single think-piece on “what can be done about it either way”. Still nothing on “what can be done about it today, here, now” while we can still somewhat breathe.

We must remember what has come before, and shake ourselves out of this fugue. We must not waste time staring with mouths agape at the absurd horror of it all, but take advantage of the lull before the storm so as to make plans for resistance. To prepare to fight and block the aspirations of whatever monster gets in.