

The Orange Man

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SO HERE WE are. Either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton will be our next president. “Our”? I am not a US citizen, and have no desire to be one.

But I live in a world in which the USA is the sole superpower, in which every decision of the US administration has an impact on the lives of every human being.

FOR ME AS a citizen of Israel, this impact is much greater than for most and much more immediate. I just saw a cartoon showing both Trump and Hillary crawling on the ground and licking the boots of an Israeli soldier. This is not too much of an exaggeration.

Both candidates claim to be unwavering supporters of “Israel”. But what does that mean? Do they support all sections of Israeli society?

Certainly not. They support one certain part of Israel: the ultra-right-wing government of Binyamin Netanyahu, which is supported by the American Jewish billionaires who contribute to their coffers.

Supporting Netanyahu and his even more right-wing coalition partners means acting against me and millions of other Israelis who can see that Netanyahu is leading our state to disaster.

Yet I have no right to vote. It is a clear case of “no representation”, imposed on me and some billions of other human beings.

BE THAT as it may, I have a clear interest in this election. So I want at least to express my opinion.

Right at the beginning, I wrote that Donald Trump reminded me in some ways of Adolf Hitler.

Now, after all the primaries and conventions, as the race assumes its final form, I am afraid that I must repeat that terrible assessment.

Of course, there are huge dissimilarities. The man looks different. He has orange-colored hair. His body language is different, and so is his style of speech.

Different times. Different countries. Different circumstances.

And, first of all, different media. Hitler was a product of the radio. It was his voice, a unique instrument, that

conquered the German masses. I am told that today's German young people burst into laughter when they see old clips of Hitler's speeches.

Trump is a creation of the TV era. He dominates the small screen. He beat all his rivals on TV. He will easily beat Hillary on TV. If the battle were fought only on TV, it would already have been decided for good.

THE SIMILARITY between Trump and Hitler exists on a different level.

In the center of Trump's entire campaign there stands one word, indeed one letter: “I”. There is no “We”. No normal ideology. No real program.

It is all about “I”, about Trump. Trump will come. Trump will fix everything.

That was the essence of Hitlerism, too. The man had no real program.¹

This was also true of the man who invented Fascism: Benito Mussolini. The Italian dictator, Hitler's teacher in many ways, did not know the word “we” either. The first of the “Ten Commandments” of fascism was: “Mussolini is always right”. So with Trump.

The absolute centrality of the Leader is the hallmark of fascism. Trump's program is Trump.

THIS BEING so, all of Trump's declarations and policy statements are totally unimportant. Pundits who analyze them, who turn them over and over, who look for hidden meanings, are just wasting their time. There is no real meaning, either open or hidden.

Statements are made on the spur of the moment because they suit Trump at that moment. They are forgotten the next, sometimes to be replaced by the opposite. They are an instrument, nothing more.

This is why it is so easy to catch Trump uttering a lie. I have seen lists of dozens of them, one more blatant than the next.

There again we have the example of Adolf Hitler. In his book “Mein Kampf” (“My Struggle”) he speaks about this openly. The book itself is quite boring, the product of a third-rate mind, but it includes several chapters about “propaganda” which are fascinating.²

¹Yes, there was something called “the 24 points”, put together by the party's ideologues, but Hitler ignored them completely. Once he exclaimed in despair: “I wish we had never heard of them!”

²Many people credit Joseph Goebbels with the invention of Nazi propaganda. But the “little doctor” was only a disciple of the Fuehrer himself.

As a front-line soldier throughout the four years of World War I (yet never rising above the rank of lance-corporal) Hitler was immensely impressed by the British propaganda effort aimed at the German lines. Hitler admired the British slogans, which to him were a pack of lies. One of his conclusions was that the bigger the lie, the bigger its chances of being believed, since a simple person cannot imagine that anybody would dare to lie so much.³

There seems to be no lie too big for Donald Trump. His followers do not mind. Truth means nothing to them. Trump trumps truth every time.

HILLARY CLINTON is a good, ordinary politician. Her outstanding attribute is that she is a woman. That, by itself, is very important. Though Golda Meir taught me that a woman can be as catastrophic as a man.

You can, with fair assurance, imagine what a Hillary Clinton presidency would look like. She is dependable, predictable. More of the same, though without the charm of Barack (and Michelle!) Obama.

No one can predict a Trump presidency. Every prediction is a leap in the dark.

One thing seems real: his admiration for Vladimir Putin. Though he is the very opposite of the cool, calculating, bold but cautious former KGB apparatchik, Trump seems to admire him.

There is not much evidence that the admiration is mutual, but it seems certain that today's successors of the KGB are interfering actively in the American election, doing their utmost to help Trump and sabotage Hillary.

Trump has already declared that he would not automatically come to the aid of Latvia, if this former Soviet and now NATO country were attacked by Russia. Has Latvia paid for its defense?⁴

A US-Russian rapprochement may be a good thing. The present American knee-jerk enmity towards everything Russian is a remnant of the Cold War and bad for the world at large. I don't see why the two powers cannot cooperate in many fields.

Towards the third power, China, the Trump attitude is

the opposite. He wants to annul the trade agreements and bring the jobs back home. Even I, a non-economist, can see that this is nonsense.

And so forth. It's all like seeing a man about to jump from the roof out of sheer curiosity.

The Germans who voted in April 1933 for Adolf Hitler and his party did not dream about World War II, though Hitler was already resolved to conquer Eastern Europe and open it up for German colonization. They were hypnotized by Hitler's personality. And—unlike the President of the USA—the German Reichskanzler was not the most important leader in the world.

I HATE the choice of the Lesser Evil. In twenty Israeli election campaigns (except the four in which I was myself a candidate) I have voted for parties I did not like very much and for candidates I did not trust at all.

But this is a fact of life. If there is no candidate you can root for, you take the one who can cause the minimum damage. In 1933 my father voted for a German conservative party, because he believed that they were the only ones who had a chance of stopping the Nazis. As Pierre Mendes-France once said: “to live is to choose”.

I want to say to all my American friends: Go out and vote for Hillary, whether you like her or not. Liking does not really come into it.

Don't stay at home. Not voting means voting for Trump.

An old Jewish joke speaks about a rich Jew, who was detested by everyone in the community. When he died, nobody was prepared to make the funeral speech, in which one is allowed by custom only to say positive things. At long last one person volunteered.

“We all know that the dear deceased was an awful person,” he said. “But compared to his son he was an angel!”

Well, Hillary Clinton is not awful. She is an acceptable candidate. But compared to Donald Trump, she is an angel.

³Actually, Hitler vastly overestimated the effectiveness of the British propaganda. It started to have effect only when the German lines were already crumbling.

⁴“Mr. President, the Russian army has just invaded Latvia! Shall we send our troops in?”—“Wait, wait! First check if the damn Latvians have paid their dues to NATO!”