

Charlie Kirk and the concealed legacy of American Nazi George Lincoln Rockwell

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In the days since the killing of Charlie Kirk, the Trump administration and its allies have unleashed a torrent of threats against the “radical left,” branding dissent as “domestic terrorism” and effectively declaring that educators, nurses and federal workers are potential enemies of the state. Corporations have joined in the purge: airline employees, teachers, journalists and other workers have been fired simply for making critical remarks about Kirk.

All of this is being done while elevating, to the stature of a national hero, an individual whose political positions were undeniably fascist. If there is any individual whom Kirk most closely resembles, in terms of persona and political tactics, it is George Lincoln Rockwell, the leader of the American Nazi Party in the 1960s. While his name has long been forgotten by the broad public, Rockwell remains a source of inspiration for the extreme right.

He created the playbook that Kirk later followed: traveling to universities—wearing a suit and tie rather than his Nazi uniform—to “debate” ideas with students and posturing as a defender of “free speech.” Rockwell, smoking an ever-present corncob pipe, presented himself as a political philosopher, thoughtful intellectual and man of ideas, unafraid to argue with his enemies. Though a savage racist, Rockwell even attended a rally of the Black Muslims in 1961. He used such media events to attract attention and recruit to his Nazi organization.

Rockwell was eventually shot to death by a disgruntled member of his own party in August 1967. Though the killing was front page news, the coverage was focused on the exposure of his politics. Flags were not lowered to half staff, and not even the right-wing senators from the South delivered eulogies for the would-be American Hitler. The president of the United States, Lyndon Johnson, took no official notice of Rockwell’s death.

But those were different times. Little more than two decades had passed since the end of World War II, and the racist politics and crimes of the Third Reich were still fresh in people’s memories.

Now, facilitated by the cowardice of the Democratic Party

and tight corporate censorship of the media, the identification of Kirk as a fascist is being banned. Rather than exposing the fraud of his “free speech” schtick, Kirk is being celebrated as a courageous warrior for the healthy exchange of ideas. Typical of the Democratic Party’s adaptation to the Kirk myth is the statement of *New York Times* liberal columnist Ezra Klein: “Kirk was practicing politics in exactly the right way.”

The establishment media is observing a deceitful silence regarding Kirk’s opposition to the Civil Rights Act, his denunciation of supposed “Jewish control” over politics and culture, his contempt for democracy, and his promotion of the neo-Nazi “Great Replacement” theory, according to which Jews and others are seeking to submerge whites beneath a sea of immigrants.

The Trump administration’s canonization of Kirk is of a piece with the attack on the Smithsonian for emphasizing “how bad slavery was” and the rehabilitation of Confederate generals. In Kirk, the most reactionary factions of the ruling class have found a symbol for the offensive they are mounting: a revival of the ideology of the slavocracy in the service of the modern-day oligarchy.

There is no modern precedent in American history for the language of police state dictatorship spewing from the White House and its leading propagandists. The most basic democratic principles—from freedom of speech and the separation of church and state to the constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship—are being repudiated. The Trump administration is all but waving the flag of the Confederacy and proclaiming that it wants to refight the American Civil War.

While the violence of the Trump administration’s rhetoric has produced a sense of shock among millions of people who, if they had even heard of Kirk, despised everything he stood for, it is inevitable that outraged opposition to the White House’s effort to legitimize fascism, not only in words but in practice, will emerge. The development of this opposition into a political movement that is capable of opposing the escalating assault on democratic rights requires

a clear understanding of the underlying social and political causes.

The words and actions of the Trump administration cannot be reduced to the fascistic personality of the present occupant of the White House. In the final analysis, Trump is the representative of a capitalist oligarchy, whose policies and actions are a response to the intersecting crises confronting American capitalism.

The economic position of American capitalism is increasingly untenable. The United States carries nearly \$40 trillion in public debt, and there are mounting signs of recession, rising inflation and threats to the global position of the US dollar. Internationally, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza are component parts of an escalating global war, including the advanced preparations for conflict with China. The scale of imperialist violence that is being prepared is not compatible with democratic forms of rule.

Most significantly, the ruling elite fears the growth of opposition within the United States itself. The extreme and historically unprecedented growth of social inequality has produced enormous levels of social and political anger. A staggering \$6.6 trillion is concentrated in the hands of US billionaires, just one of whom—Oracle's Larry Ellison—increased his wealth by over \$100 billion in a single day last week.

The American oligarchy feels itself under siege, perceiving around every corner the specter of revolution and an existential threat to its wealth. Hence the ever more hysterical denunciations of the “radical left,” of Marxism and socialism.

Despite unrelenting propaganda, the elevation of anticommunism into a state religion and the systematic exclusion of socialist politics from official life and the media, nearly 40 percent of the population expresses a favorable view of socialism, according to a recent Gallup poll. Support for capitalism has fallen sharply, from 60 percent in 2021 to just 54 percent today. Disaffection is concentrated above all among young people, who are being radicalized by the experiences through which they are passing.

The working class, as the Socialist Equality Party noted in its statement of September 15, is “the greatest untapped force in the United States and internationally.” Over the past four decades, the vast expansion of global industry and technology has swelled the ranks of wage laborers by more than 2 billion. Humanity is now more urbanized than ever before, with the majority of people living in cities.

This does not make the actions of Trump and his allies any less dangerous. The oligarchy has at its disposal immense resources, and it seeks to exploit the high level of social and

political backwardness that persists in American society. The fascists in the government, acting on behalf of this ruling class, are absolutely determined to employ violence and whatever means necessary to defend their wealth and power.

Their main advantage lies in the bankruptcy and political complicity of the Democratic Party. The return of the political gangster Trump to power, and the implementation of his conspiracy for dictatorship, depends entirely on the collaboration of this party of Wall Street and the Pentagon.

The Democrats subordinate every expression of popular opposition to the demand for “bipartisanship,” even as Trump and his allies plot civil war. They fear nothing more than the independent mobilization of the working class, which would threaten not only Trump but the entire capitalist order they defend.

The Socialist Equality Party insists that the decisive task is to build within the working class a conscious political movement that breaks free from the entire straitjacket of official politics. In the United States, this means a break with the Democratic Party and all those organizations that exist to maintain the stranglehold of the Democratic Party. The apparatus of the corporatist trade unions, moreover, functions as a suffocating block on working class struggle—diverting workers either into support for the Democrats or into the nationalist poison of Trump’s trade war demagogery.

The SEP fights for the construction of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the union bureaucracy, to serve as centers of organization not only for the defense of workers’ jobs, wages and conditions, but also for the defense of the most basic democratic rights.

This must be connected to a revolutionary program that takes direct aim at the social foundation of fascism and dictatorship: the capitalist oligarchy. The SEP fights for the expropriation of the billionaires’ wealth, the transformation of the giant corporations into publicly owned utilities and workers’ control over production. Only through such measures can society be reorganized to meet human needs, not private profit. The immense social power of the working class, mobilized on this basis, provides the only real foundation for the defense of democracy and the securing of a future for humanity.



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