

The Big Blue Wave? Not So Fast By Steven Jonas

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As the Trump Presidency seems to be sliding into the mud in the real world (although not in the Alternative Reality of Right-Wing TV and talk radio) and Republican policies (or lack thereof, e.g. the "massive infrastructure program") are becoming increasingly unpopular, there is much talk of a "Blue Wave" coming in the 2018 Congressional elections. It would appear to be fairly certain in the House of Representatives, which is the primary reason why so many Republicans are retiring, even some with safe seats like the sterlingly reactionary Trey Gowdy of South Carolina. (You remember him. He poked around "Benghazi and Clinton" endlessly and found --- nothing. Well, actually because it was a CIA operation gone wrong from the git-go he found nothing that he could talk about publicly.) Recently there has been talk even about the Senate flipping. This is so even though while the Repubs. hold only a two-seat majority most of the seats up for re-election this time around are Democratic, many in normally Red states.

But, let us not count our chickens before they hatch. Major Republican powers, this time around especially some huge donors of both light and dark money like the Kochs and the Mercers have been preparing for this eventuality. First of all, there will be tons of Repub. money from these folks. Second of all, they still have what MSNBC's Chris Hayes like to call "Trump TV" plus that endless supply of right-wing talk radio. Third of all the Koch-funded American Legislative Exchange Council, ALEC, founded in 2007 for the express purpose of taking over state legislatures, so that the Repubs. could control much of the re-districting that occurred in 2010, is still very much in play. And so is the gerrymandering as well as the restrictive "Voter I.D." laws that they have sponsored. (Quite obviously that objective of the latter was not to improve the security of voting. Otherwise, getting a photo I.D. would be made readily available --- as in having camera-equipped photo I.D. offices in every locale and neighborhood --- paid for by the state governments. It wasn't.) And of course, there is the tried and true technique, used by all political parties of motivating "the base" to come out and vote.

We are seeing more and more of Trump/Republican motivation of the Christian Right, the mis-named "evangelical" vote (mis-named because many evangelicals are not Repubs.) Despite all of the Presidents failings when it comes to the "morality" with which the Christian Right is supposed to be concerned, what counts for them when it comes to voting is: the criminalization, on religious grounds, of any choice in the outcome of pregnancy other than theirs; the promotion, through the use of the law (or rather the non-use of the law) to enable discrimination against homosexuals; the enabling of the use of churches (theirs) for political purposes while retaining their tax-exempt status; and the "religification" of education, public and private.

The Religious Right accounts for a relatively small proportion of voters overall, but if they can be motivated to go to the polls in a large proportion, they can control electoral outcomes. This is one strategy that the Trump/Repubs. are relying on this year. As many of my readers know, in 1996 I published a book called *The 15% Solution* which predicted an eventual Repub./Religious Right takeover of the national and state governments, with the eventual development of a fascist state. The name came from a voting strategy developed in the late 1980s designed to enable just such an outcome. Since I believe that it will be in play in the upcoming election, I am devoting the balance of this column to an excerpt from the book (recall that it was published in 1996) that describes it in some detail.

The 15% Solution

(Text from *The 15% Solution: How the Republican Religious Right Took Control of the U.S. 1981-2022: A Futuristic Novel*, chap. 2)

"The 15% Solution" was an electoral strategy developed by the leading political organ of the Religious Right, the so-called "Christian Coalition" (ADL). The "Christian Coalition" was an unabashed, unapologetic, and out-spoken

representative of that authoritarian thinking (see also Dino Louis' discussion of the nature of fascism in Appendix II) which under their influence was so prominently represented in the politics of the Republican Party, beginning at their 1992 National Convention. The strategy was designed to win elections even when the Coalition's supporters comprised a distinct minority of the eligible electorate. As an early Christian Coalition Executive Director, Ralph Reed, once said (Harkin): "I paint my face and travel at night. You don't know it's over until you're in a body bag."

Although in later public statements, the Christian Coalition made at tempts to cover up or even disavow the strategy, according to its 1991 National Field Director, it was formulated in the follow ing way (Rodgers):

"In a Presidential election, when more voters turn out than [in] any other election you normally see, only 15% of eligible voters determine the outcomes of that election . . . Of all adults 18 and over, eligible to vote, only about 60 or 65% are actually registered to vote. It might even be less than that, and it is less than that in many states. . . .

"Of those registered to vote, in a good turnout only 50% actually vote. [Thus,] only 30% of those eligible actually vote. . . . 15% of adults eligi ble to vote determine the outcome in a high turnout election. That happens once every four years. . . . In low turnout elections, city council, state legislature, county commissions, the per cent age who (sic) determines who wins can be as low as 6 or 7%. We don't have to worry about convin ing a majority of Americans to agree with us. Most of them are staying home and watching Roseanne" [emphasis added]. (Author's Note: Roseanne was a popular television program of that time. Current note: Of note in the Trump Era, this show, starring a well-known Trumpite, Roseanne Barr, is making a comeback.)]

As one of the most influential leaders of the Religious Right, Paul Weyrich, succinctly put it (Freedom Writer, Nov., 1994): "We don't want everyone to vote. Quite frankly, our leverage goes up as the voting population goes down."

Elected allies of the Christian Coalition worked to make this wish a reality. For example, a Governor of Virginia, George F. Allen, elected in 1992 with open Christian Coalition support, attempted by the use of the veto to prevent implementation of Federal legislation designed to make it easier for people to register to vote (NYT).

By the national election of 1994, Right Wing Reaction was well on its way to achieving its goal. Only about 38% of eligible voters voted. That turnout was part of the process that came to be referred to as the "Incredible Shrinking Electorate." With slightly more than half of those voting choosing the old Republican Party's Congressional candidates that year, the Party achieved a major turnaround in Congressional representation and took control of that body.

Many of the new representatives were supported by the Christian Coalition and its allies. In an odd representation of reality, most media and political figures represented that victory as one reflecting the views of the "American people" as a whole. In fact, the Republican victory was achieved by garnering the support of less than 20% of the eligible voters. "The 15% Solution" was well within sight.

The political posture adopted by the opposition Democrats played a significant role in the creation of the Incredible Shrinking Electorate. They gave the majority of increasingly disaffected people nothing to come out to the polls for but either a warmed-over imitation of Repub li can Party policies, or a set of well-intentioned but ineffective alternatives.

The minority of eligible voters who actually supported Republican, and later, Republican-Christian Alliance, policies turned out and voted for them. Those who wanted something significantly different, consistent with the liberal tradition of the Democratic Party, not finding it on the ballot, just stayed home. Implementation of "The 15% Solution" proceeded apace. It was eventually used by the Right-Wing Reactionaries to impose their will on the majority of the people. And just like their German Nazi predecessors, once they gained power through Constitutional means, they maintained it largely through anything but.

And yes indeed, folks, it could happen again. In face of an intense opposition pushing off-shore, the "Big Blue Wave" might indeed just be left out to sea.

