



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN
NUCLEAR DANGERS & A SAFE,
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

December 2024

A Letter to Help the Year End

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Dear Friends,

I am alive today – indeed have existed at all – because my grandparents believed that Hitler would do what he said he would do. They got my parents out of Nazi Germany, and then themselves. My great grandparents on my mother's side, however, did not believe, and felt they were too old to act, and ended up dying in a concentration camp.

Donald Trump, of course, is not identical to Adolph Hitler, although he appears to admire him and often uses similar language and tactics, fanning hatred of marginalized people, claiming they are “poisoning the blood of our country,” calling his political opponents “vermin” and “enemies of the people,” all the while planning for “detention camps” for millions of people. As the old saying goes, history does not repeat itself; it rhymes. But failing to believe that Trump will actually do what he has said he would do could be very dangerous.

Trump has promised to be a dictator on Day One. His actions in the first weeks following the election reinforce concerns about an assault on the Constitution, attempting to consolidate power in his hands alone, ending the separation of powers and checks and balances key to democracy.

What is at stake? Virtually everything important! Repeatedly claiming climate change is a “hoax,” Trump has pledged to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accord and says on Day One he will order “Drill Baby Drill.” It is an echo of the “Burn Baby Burn” chant during the Watts Riot where people burned down their own community, but here it is the whole planet that will burn. There is perhaps no more consequential impact of his pending reign than the irreversible damage he will do to efforts to restrain climate change.

A fracking executive who is a climate denier has been nominated for Energy Secretary; an opponent of environmental protections as head of the Environmental Protection Agency; a spreader of dangerous misinformation for Secretary of Health and Human Services; and the richest man in the world (with one of the world's largest egos) has been given the full government as a personal toy to play with, to gut the programs hundreds of millions of people depend upon. If you gave millions to the transactional Trump, you will have the government pay you back with additional billions, while everyday people who were suckered into supporting him will suffer. It is government of the billionaires, by the billionaires, and for the billionaires.

Hatred of marginalized people was fanned during the campaign. Absurd claims were made that in Ohio, (legal) migrants from Haiti were stealing people's cats and dogs and eating them. Plans were touted to round up millions of immigrants and put them in detention camps and deport them. One of the most effective Trump ads said simply “Harris is for they/them; Trump is for YOU.” This demonizing of the “Other,” those different than the majority, is very dangerous. It is immoral on its own, and where will it stop?

continued on reverse

Pastor Martin Niemoller, initially an anti-Semitic supporter of the Nazis, ended up spending years in concentration camps. After his release, he wrote,

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

It is thus in our own self-interest to speak out for those being attacked now, and it is also simply the right thing to do. Jesus is said to have gotten in trouble with the authorities for breaking bread with the social outcasts of his time. The key is we have to protect the “least of these” – the marginalized.

So, I know that many of you are in the same situation as we – desperately concerned about where this country is going and not knowing what to do. With all three branches of government captured, and the news media hobbled, it is unclear what leverage there is at present to prevent the worst outcomes that may lie ahead.

But what is clear: try we must. My closest and wisest friend is the 92-year-old Sister Veronique of the Trappist monastery where I used to live on the Lost Coast. Veronique said to me recently about the current situation, “All we can do is live our lives with integrity and love.” That is a lot. Integrity and love can oppose immorality and hatred. We have to do what we can, and struggle to discern what that is in these dark times.

Three decades after my father escaped from Nazi Germany, I visited his home town, Linz am Rhein. Getting off the bus, I inquired in a nearby chocolate store for directions to the former home of Werner Hirsch and his parents, Waldemar and Toni. The house was in the town square and looked as it did in an old etching we have: the store on the first floor (my grandfather’s linen store now replaced by a baby clothes store) and two stories of living space. When I returned to catch a bus out of town, the owner of the chocolate store rushed out with a box of chocolate liqueurs and asked me to give them to my father when I returned to the U.S. Tell him, the man said, that we liked his family very much and were very sorry they had to go.

It was the quintessential “good German.” I suspect this man was genuinely sad about what had happened. But he and his fellow townspeople had done nothing to stop it; many indeed had supported and profited from it. They had not spoken out, had not worked against the horror. We now must not be “good Americans,” silent in the face of evil. We must find a way to speak out and work against that evil, protect marginalized people and the environment at risk. We must find a way to live our lives with integrity and love in the dark days ahead.

Peace, and other responsibilities,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Dan', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Dan Hirsch