

DEFINITIONS: THE BOURGEOISIE



HELP ENLIGHTEN YOUR FELLOWS. BE SURE TO PASS THIS ON. SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON IT.

ANNOTATED BY PATRICE GREANVILLE

“We are not fighting against men or a kind of politics but against the class which produces those politics and those men.” (from *Dirty Hands*, a political play by Jean Paul Sartre, first performed in Paris on April 2, 1948.)

“It takes a day to make a senator and ten years to make a worker.” AND, as Caligula says to the senators: “It is much easier to descend the social ladder than to climb back up.” (from the play *Caligula* by Albert Camus, first performed in Paris in 1945, words I include here just for fun, mockery and a hint of warning.)

(Rome)

It’s a capricious irony of history that the word *bourgeois*, which most clearly pinpoints the capitalist class, is

perceived by nearly everyone, including the bourgeois themselves, as an epithet and is almost universally despised.

Generally we conceive of the bourgeois in reference to their over emphasis on form and formality, [the aversion to making waves, no matter how unjust the situation], in total contrast with the image of the bohemian radical. Bourgeois characteristics include emphasis on tradition, pretentiousness, conventionality, propriety, status obsession, respectability at all costs, an affected and fashionable manner of speech and an overall comportment befitting such a description. The bourgeois personality is one of seeming rather than being.

To most ears both the noun and the adjective *bourgeois* ring negative and evil. Both upper and lower social classes detest that person and class. Bourgeois bastard! Fucking bourgeois! No wonder few people choose to identify themselves as bourgeois, preferring "middle class" or some such.

My family discussion is a good example. For some years my wife and I benefited from an apartment exchange with a person in a central area of Paris so that we spent several months a year there. Though I prefer Paris to my home Rome, my individualistic Italian, French-speaking wife doesn't share my enthusiasm. Scornfully, dismissively, she charges that Parisians are too bourgeois. Too closed, too clannish. Bonjour, Madame, bonjour Monsieur, au revoir Madame, au revoir Monsieur, all day long. For her Paris is atrocious, people don't meet each other, they're indifferent, uninterested in relations with others, in their work, life, in their life. I can't pin her down as to what she *really* means but she stubbornly insists that Parisians are unbearably bourgeois. Clearly the sense in which she uses "bourgeois" is the most common in the world today.

In this essay however I have in mind the socio-political meaning of bourgeoisie, the morally corrupt class that Marxism

equates with the capitalist class. Precisely the corrupt bandit class of the USA saved by the great financial bailout of Wall Street. Which shows again that in the eternal class struggle the bourgeoisie is the evil oppressor. The crucial distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat is the distinction between evil and good. Yet, the modern age is known as the epoch of the bourgeoisie, that is, of capitalism.

That is the great contradiction of our epoch. Since the modern revolutions eliminated monarchies and simplified the class struggle, western society has been divided into two hostile camps: the bourgeoisie as described here, which runs things, and the proletariat which resists exploitation by it. The ethical pathos of Marxism is the exposure of exploitation of proletarian labor as the basis of human society.

One recalls that the bourgeoisie played the major role in the French Revolution. Since then, in the shape and form of the capitalist system, it has maintained the upper hand most everywhere, or sooner or later regained it, as in post-Communist East Europe. It has crushed the other classes and converted everyone else into wage earners. That is simply its nature.

The close collaboration of American and European capitalism up until World War II was a confirmation of their secret alliance sans frontières. In the immediate post-war America's renewed alliance with the residue of Nazi Germany against Communist Russia was a resumption of the pre-war Fascist-Capitalist bond against Soviet Russia. In that sense the Fascist-Capitalist blood alliance created by the bourgeoisie of Europe and the USA controlled and protected each other against the working class.

For its prosperity the capitalist bourgeoisie depends on free trade. Except for down moments when things go haywire for free market capitalism, especially on deregulated and uncontrolled

Wall Street and it turns back to the people to bail it out of the chaos it creates at regular intervals. Its very survival depends on unending growth and constantly expanding markets, the continual acceleration and revolutionizing of production, political centralization and today in Europe and the USA on the exportation of jobs to the poor world. Meanwhile bourgeois (bandit) capitalism requires and has achieved the concentration of property and wealth in ever fewer hands, to the current obscene level whereby 8 billionaires own as much wealth as one half of humanity. Grotesque inequality its signature product, even if it is just an afterthought, something inherent in its social dynamic. That is its constant goal. It thrives on the incessant creation of new desires—subsequently morphed into needs—throughout the world. In that sense the bourgeoisie is through and through cosmopolitan.

Paradoxically, those primary requisites for the bourgeoisie's existence provoke—or should provoke—the resistance of the proletariat. It's a vicious circle. In a great dialectic the survival needs of the bourgeoisie generate the resistance that can ultimately crush it. The resistance that according to Marxist theory will crush it someday. These days, there for everyone to see, for everyone to feel, the spreading sense of unease marking its successive economic-financial crises point to the eventual demise of bourgeois, bandit capitalism.



Luis Buñuel's mordant satire *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) dissected the vacuity, sociopathy and pretensions of this class, and its condescending attitude toward labor. Buñuel, a Spanish communist of aristocratic origins and a giant of surrealist cinema based in France, also made other films highly critical of the bourgeois regime, including the acclaimed *Belle de Jour*. In *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977) he closed the film with a scene that clearly presages the scourge of urban terrorism in the developed world.

[dropcap]S[/dropcap]o why has it not already happened, one must wonder? Why hasn't it collapsed long ago? Though the bourgeoisie-capitalist class is small and the proletariat wage earners an overwhelming majority, why don't the exploited classes rebel and rebel, revolt and revolt, again and again? Why not? The reason is clear: the exploited classes are not only victims. They are also accomplices. Half victim, half accomplice. The historical paradox. The ruling class counts on this dichotomy to maintain the system. Divide and rule. Meritocracy. Rewards for obedience. Two cars and bigger houses for staying in line. A system based on money, domination, pervasive indoctrination of Orwellian proportions, and fear.

Religion too, and FEAR. Fear of fear. Fear of change. Fear, fear, fear. A fearful people is an obedient people. Today's Americans are a sacrificed generation. Their illusion of true love has faded. Instead there is the feminine side—seduction and sex ever before us, in all its forms. Love is not the question. For love you still need illusion and innocence. And we are a disillusioned generation. All of us. Only fiction remains. And our bitterness, jealousy and fear. That's why you need an absolute overwhelming desire to resist and fight back. The only alternative is to flee into the mountains or the desert, 20 miles from anyplace. No banks, no commerce, no bureaucratic offices in sight. Or perhaps walk the labyrinth in the Chartres Cathedral in search of the final secret, the beautiful butterfly to change things.

"Marx's social analysis of Germany has held good for 150 years. In his words, "it is entirely false that *social* need produces *political* understanding." That sentence would apply more to the USA today than to anywhere else in the world..."

At the same time there is a glut of everything in the Western world. Yet vampire bourgeois capitalism cannot cut back. Staggering, careening on its crazy course, it goes after more and more growth, to survive. It needs more and more production, more markets, more and cheaper labor, more consumers (while salaries everywhere are lower and lower so that consumption decreases), more power, more of everything, clearly unachievable forever. How fast can a man run, one

asked after the new world record 100-meter dash at the Beijing Olympics? 9.5 seconds? Then tomorrow, perhaps 9 seconds. Then 8. But can it go on forever, faster and faster?

Bourgeoisie, Borghesia, Burguesía, Bürgerstand. Middle class! The French word *bourgeoisie*, originally in reference to inhabitants of towns or bourgs, is most expressive of the class's socio-political signification, especially in reference to the upper or merchant class, who are the capitalists. (Also in socio-political language the word bourgeois has pejorative overtones, smacking of undeserved wealth and nouveaux riches tastes.) Then there is their chief political support, the crutch of the bourgeois capitalism: the so-called petite bourgeoisie, the class between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the shopkeeper class, the urban people, the target of populist leaders since the Roman Empire, the followers of dictators from Mussolini to Hitler and Pinochet, who are the flag-waving super Americans of today.

On the other hand, the European bourgeoisie is not to be confused with the American middle class. They are not the same thing. Sociologically, in the pejorative sense my wife means, both Italy and France *are* largely "bourgeois". North Europe is let's say even more of the petit petit bourgeois category; East Europe and Latin America are by nature proletarian with a thin bourgeois-intellectual class at the top. The European bourgeoisie creates more culture, while in the USA most probably because of social mobility (itself rapidly vanishing) culture and art can come from anywhere.

Since the rebellious years after 1968, fixed class relationships have diminished in Europe too, especially evident in Italy and the France. Europe is again rich. Life style is more bourgeois. Still, within that bourgeoisie are the most educated classes, which in the past produced also the intelligentsia wing and the revolutionary vanguard. Therefore, and in contrast with the USA, from that same bourgeois class—also marked by set values and tradition—have emerged the

movements for drastic social change.

Today with the Right winds of neo-liberalism sweeping over Europe, those times seem distant. 1968 belongs to another epoch. Still, the term *bourgeoisie* as used by the radical Left in Europe and the USA (many or most of whom are bourgeois renegades) depicts the society the Left opposes. Yet nowhere else were whole peoples more jubilant than Europeans over America's recent fall back on nationalizations of the core of the financial system (which despite stringent efforts the European Union has not yet succeeded in eliminating completely) to save temporarily its economic neck and the "American way of life" and reinforce the transformation to Fascism.

One doesn't forget easily that the bourgeoisie was guilty of creating Fascism. The European and American bourgeoisie propped up Fascism in order to preserve its own social rule. For the basis of its rule, private property and capitalism, was threatened by the proletarian revolution that Western Socialists (largely emerging from the same bourgeoisie), still in the throes of nationalism, were never able to pull off. For the European upper bourgeoisie, Fascism was little more than an annoyance that saved their system. World War II was preferable to proletarian revolution. We are witnessing a repetition of that history in the USA today.

The close collaboration of American and European capitalism up until World War II was a confirmation of their secret alliance sans frontières. In the immediate post-war America's renewed alliance with the residue of Nazi Germany against Communist Russia was a resumption of the pre-war Fascist-Capitalist bond against Soviet Russia. In that sense the Fascist-Capitalist blood alliance created by the bourgeoisie of Europe and the USA controlled and protected each other against the working class.

The bourgeoisie in feudal pre-revolutionary France was a

specific class. Much wealthier than the lower classes, it however lacked the privileges of the aristocracy against whom it made the French Revolution. It made its revolution in order to rip political power from the hands of the aristocracy and acquire its privileges. It became the new ruling class.

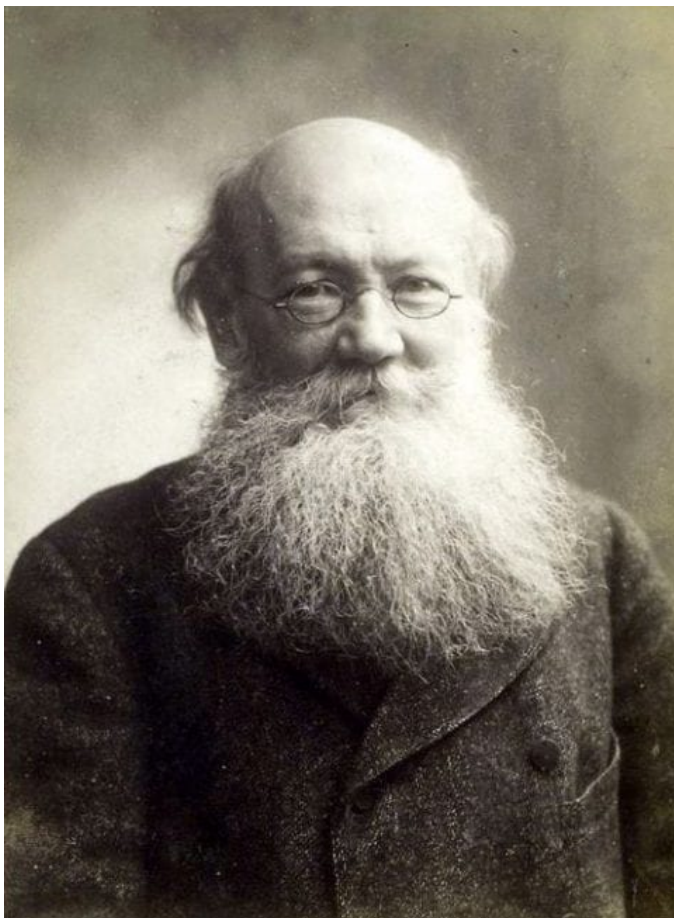
It was the fervent desire of the bourgeoisie to ape the social parasitism and privileges of the nobility it was forced to displace...this is the ultimate meaning of all bourgeois revolutions.

Since then it has incurred the hate and wrath of all other classes. Deregulation is not new. Bourgeois slogans have always been 'no rules, no laws, all power to the middle classes.' Compromise with other powers, yes,—especially with organized religions and various forms of “democracy”—but forever at the expense of the working classes.

In the bourgeois world anywhere and under any form of government workingmen are destined to remain forever workingmen. No more than that.

Lest one forget: despite the high-sounding and immortal words, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, the French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution against royal power and the aristocracy, and executed in the beginning by the “people.” The only things lacking to the “freedom” of the bourgeoisie were equal privileges and participation in the government, i.e. political power. It overthrew the king, took power and then did precious little for the sans culottes. The bourgeoisie emerged victorious. In the bourgeois capitalist world the words liberty, equality and brotherhood have remained to this day empty slogans, only applicable to their own class...

The principle of private property is a religion that has nothing to do with homeownership. *It refers to ownership of the means of production.* That is, great wealth and the political power to back it up. That religion was and remained the economic basis of the French Revolution. That has never changed. But for that very same reason, the great Socialist revolution was always just a hairsbreadth away. That again is the history of man.



Kropotkin

[dropcap]N[/dropcap]onetheless the French Revolution was the great awakening. Despite its bourgeois character and the power it wielded, the communist idea kept coming to the front. According to **Peter Kropotkin**, in his memorable classic, *The Great French Revolution*, the word Socialism came into vogue chiefly in order to avoid the term Communism. Kropotkin:

“Secret Communist societies became action societies, and were rigorously suppressed by the *bourgeoisie*.” The fearful bourgeoisie first checked the revolutionary impulse in France and soon restored the monarchy to guarantee its survival. The spirit of the French Revolution was nonetheless contagious. Kropotkin closed his major work with immortal praise for it: “The one thing certain is, that whatsoever nation enters on the path of revolution in our own day, it will be heir to all our forefathers have done in France.”

Soon afterwards Marxism came along to pinpoint and define once and for all the bourgeoisie as the exploiting class, the class that obtains its income from capital and commerce. The bourgeoisie is the ruling class because it owns the means of production—land, factories and resources. Moreover it has the means of coercion of the lower classes. By control of police and army it is able to keep in line and exploit the work of wage earners who live only from their labor. Perhaps in no other major country do Marx’s theses more concisely describe the societal line-up than in the USA today. Therefore America cannot, will not remain forever immune to the class struggle, quiet today, deathly quiet, mute, unvoiced, but potentially explosive.

A graffiti on the walls of the Sèvres-Babylone metro station in Paris noted by French writer Michel Houellebecq—reductive, curious, ambivalent, and even permissive slogan as it is—rings like a warning, the very minimum warning, to the tiny American capitalist class, new born Christian or not: “God wanted inequalities but not injustices.”

As was the bourgeoisie in post-revolutionary France, Power in America is aware of the menace and the threat of the extension of the struggle for justice to all social classes, to *el pueblo unido*. Therefore the system’s perfidious use of terrorism and fear, religion, the American way of life and the future of our children to hoodwink the people.

One often hears the expression *exploitation* of labor. What does it mean exactly?

It's basic. The heart of Marxism. Its validity is recognized most everywhere. The capitalist owner of the means of production pays wages and production costs and then sells the goods produced by labor, keeping for himself the difference between costs and sales. Part of his profit is Marx's "surplus value." It's the size of his profit (in the aggregate especially, as it often happens with industrial fortunes, when the profits from labor are multiplied by the number of employees producing saleable output) that creates inequalities. The point is the worker creates the wealth of the greedy capitalist, who squeezes the workingman up to the limit, gaining thousands of times more than the worker can earn in a lifetime. That is injustice. The owner, the entrepreneur and his executives (here we mean also the real owners and CEOs of banks and funds, of stock markets, insurance giants, holding companies and the like) gain the maximum profit without actually doing any work. And he has the bourgeois government ready to bail him out when he fucks up, which his greed causes at regular intervals. That too is exploitation of labor. That is injustice.

Karl Marx used the word *bourgeois* to describe the social class that holds property and capital making possible exploitation. Though he recognized the bourgeoisie's industriousness, he criticized its moral hypocrisy for its exploitation of other men. As time passed he came to use *bourgeois* to describe not only the class, but also its ideology: class society based on capitalism and labor. A society of the capitalist and the worker.

Members of the American middle class are marked by considerable diversity, who however tend to overlap. They prize non-conformity, innovation and independence and tend to comprise also the artistically creative part of the nation. Education is a chief indicator of middle class status.

Education (with its implicit meritocratic/egalitarian promise) is fundamental to prepare members of the class for creative and leadership roles. For that reason, writers, educators, teachers, journalists, doctors, artists and the mainline media owners come chiefly from the middle class (es).

It is that middle class-bourgeoisie that has written the bulk of modern social and political history. The history most of us know best is *their* view of history. Now that history must be re-written. Everything must be reviewed. Everything must be revised. All of it—World Wars I and II, the “forgotten” Korean War where it all started, the Cold War, the USSR, Stalin, Iran, Iraq. Everything. Especially 9/11. GW Bush in power is not the same thing as Reagan who set the scene. But something changed. What changed? That is also a mystery that must be clarified.

One change is that the real American upper middle class is shrinking in size. And from generation to generation it is becoming more elite. Sociologists instruct us that at today's pace another generation will suffice to eliminate the class. The prohibitive costs of higher education today guarantee the manifest elitism in America and the continuity of power in the hands of the smaller and smaller and best educated upper, to a great extent capitalist class, who more and more constitute also the *direct* political class. The American middle class is the most representative of the America the world is familiar with, not very complimentary of that class in view of the widely diffused anti-Americanism in the world. Yet it is threatened with extinction.



American TV's 1960s and '70s represented to Americans and the world at large the apex of white-middle-class existence, the apotheosis of the "American Way of Life", with its promise of affluence for all via fierce privatism and conformity to the rules of capitalism—alias "free enterprise.". (Photo: The Dick Van Dyke Show)

That is, eliminated by way of a *golpe*. A coup d'état. Executed by elite America against America itself.

The fervor of bourgeois revolution infected Russia from the early XIX century. Originally Social Democracy developed independently of the working classes in Russia, just as in the West. But as the class struggle intensified and sharpened, Lenin and the revolutionary Socialist intellectuals came to differ from the rest. Lenin preached that the choice came down to one between "bourgeois ideology" and "Socialist ideology". The former pointed toward reform and the creation of capitalism before social revolution. Lenin aimed at

revolution, here and now, before the creation and organization of a great working class capable of making the revolution itself.

As elsewhere revolutionaries in Russia were powerfully influenced by Marx's comments in his "*Critical Notes on the King of Prussia and Social Reform*" on "the feeble reaction of the German bourgeoisie to socialism" and, on the other hand, "the brilliant talents of the German proletariat for socialism." Marx often compared the impotence of the German bourgeoisie for political revolution, responsible for the political impotence of Germany itself, with the social capacity of the German proletariat.

His social analysis of Germany has held good for 150 years. In his words, "it is entirely false that *social* need produces *political* understanding." That sentence would apply more to the USA today than to anywhere else in the world.



Lenin: hated and constantly denigrated by the bourgeois, his political wisdom cannot be

nullified. History validates him.

Lenin and his Bolshevik Communists opted for the Socialist ideology. They reserved special hate for the bourgeoisie intent on maintaining its privileges at the expense of the workers. The Russian revolutionary foresight is especially meaningful in Third Millennium America. After Lenin came to power he made it clear that Russia was NOT an island of utopia. The idea of a "petit bourgeois utopia" was to remain forever anathema to Lenin and thus to the Russian Revolution. "It is a question of creating a Socialist state ... This is merely one phase through which we must pass on the way to world revolution."

In Lenin's mind most everything anti-revolutionary was bourgeois. Bourgeois attitudes. Bourgeois ethics and morality. Bourgeois plots. Bourgeois peace. Bourgeois legality. Bourgeois reaction. Bourgeois imperialism. The bourgeoisie was not going to stop him. No hairsplitting! "We are turning more and more to the Left ... We will destroy the entire bourgeoisie, grind it to a powder."

In the Leninist concept "the bourgeoisie is the class which inevitably rules under capitalism, both under a monarchy and in the most democratic republic, and which also inevitably enjoys the support of the world bourgeoisie." He knew what he was talking about, for the world bourgeoisie—Democratic, Fascist or Monarchic—never forgave or forgot the temerity, the audacity, the effrontery, of the Russian Revolution.

The Bolshevik leader had learned his lessons from the French Revolution. In his 1918 cry of "All power to the Soviets" he meant a resounding 'No!' to the bourgeoisie who instead demanded "All power to the Constituent Assembly." Lenin was not about to hand over parliamentary power to a certain bourgeois counter-revolution. The resulting bloody civil war between Reds and Whites was between those two battle cries,

between those two classes: the red revolutionary class and the white malignant bourgeoisie.

From that moment it was all-out attack on the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. "Death to the bourgeoisie!"

Pravda wrote on August 31, 1918: "Workers! If you do not now destroy the bourgeoisie, it will destroy you. Prepare for a mass attack on the enemies of the Revolution..."

Then in "Catechism of a Class-conscious Proletarian" also in *Pravda*: "The bourgeois is our eternal enemy, forever boring from within." The writer meant bankers, rich merchants, manufacturers and landowners, officers of the old guard, priests, White Guard reactionaries, upper bourgeois classes. The professed aim of the Red Terror was not to wage a war against individuals but to eliminate the bourgeoisie as a class.

Instructive for modern readers is Alexis de Tocqueville's remark about France in *L'Ancien Régime et La Révolution* written long before Lenin was born: "For the first time perhaps since the beginning of the world one sees the upper classes so isolated and separated from all the rest that one can count their members and separate them as one separates the condemned part of the herd, and the middle classes reluctant to mix with the upper classes but on the contrary jealously trying to avoid contact with them: two symptoms which if one had understood them, would have announced for all the immensity of the revolution about to be accomplished, or rather, which was already made."

That rings familiar. I mean the separation and isolation today of America's elitist capitalists from the rest of the people.

In his essay "The Transparency of Evil" Jean Baudrillard, as ever unpredictable and surprising, notes that each transparency raises the question of its contrary, the secret. Still, some things, he says, will simply never be visible.

They will remain in the secret world and are shared in secret according to a kind of exchange different from that of the visible world. But since today everything happens in the visible world, the virtual world, what happens to those things that were once secret? Step by step, delving into the secret within the secret, Baudrillard then chills you with this: they become occult, clandestine, evil. That which once was just secret becomes the evil that must be abolished. The problem is one cannot destroy them because to a certain extent the secret, like myths, is indestructible. Therefore it becomes diabolic and infects the same instruments designed to eliminate it.

I reflect on this equation of the secret, the visible and the diabolic and apply it to the subject here. Conclusion: capitalist power is the occult evil and resistance must abolish it. Our bourgeois governments profess democracy and transparency. Yet they In his essay "The Transparency of Evil" Jean Baudrillard, as ever unpredictable and surprising, notes that each transparency raises the question of its contrary, the secret. operate in the secrecy that has morphed into evil, while continuing to boast of democracy and God.

Capitalism as an economic and social system can only work when there are new frontiers to discover. Since, as we have seen, new opportunities and eternal growth are basic requirements for capitalistic society and since they have been exhausted, I too believe America has completed its historic Manifest Destiny.

Destiny. American capitalism has long loved the word. Baudrillard recalls a story about the rules of destiny, "Death in Samarkand." On a square of a town, Death makes a sign to a soldier, terrifying him. He runs to the king and tells him that Death made a sign to him. Therefore he was escaping immediately to Samarkand. The king summons Death and asks why he scared his captain. Death answers that he didn't intend frightening the soldier, he just wanted to remind him that

they had an appointment that evening in Samarkand.


About the Author



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Parting shot—a word from the editors
The Best Definition of Donald Trump We Have Found



In his zeal to prove to his antagonists in the War Party that he is as bloodthirsty as their champion, Hillary Clinton, and more manly than Barack Obama, Trump seems to have gone “play-crazy” -- acting like an unpredictable maniac in order to terrorize the Russians into forcing some kind of dramatic concessions from their Syrian allies, or risk *Armageddon*. However, the “play-crazy” gambit can only work when the leader is, in real life, a disciplined and

intelligent actor, who knows precisely what actual boundaries must not be crossed. That ain't Donald Trump -- a pitifully shallow and ill-disciplined man, emotionally handicapped by obscene privilege and cognitively crippled by white American chauvinism. By pushing Trump into a corner and demanding that he display his most bellicose self, or be ceaselessly mocked as a "puppet" and minion of Russia, a lesser power, the War Party and its media and clandestine services have created a perfect storm of mayhem that may consume us all.— **Glen Ford, Editor in Chief, Black Agenda Report**