



# P E R S P E C T I V E S

by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**

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## Intimidation Politics *Quo Vadis?*

Credit for today's headline goes to MSNBC commentator **Chris Hayes** who used the phrase last week on his nightly broadcast to describe the threat **Kevin McCarthy** leveled at the business community last week. In case you missed it, McCarthy as the Minority Leader in the House proclaimed that the Republican party, as soon as it reclaimed the House, would actively seek to punish any company that cooperated with the official House Committee investigating the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection. Specifically, he declared that 1) the Republicans would reclaim power, and 2) that *they would punish any company* (particularly the telecoms) *who cooperated with lawful inquiries* (and even subpoenas!) of the duly constituted Special House Investigative Committee. Wow! What a threat. He's telling companies that Republicans will favor those companies who cooperate with them in fostering the "Big Lie" and will actively punish or even liquidate those companies that follow the law by responding to appropriate legal process.

Just to bring the point home, Fox television featured commentators like Congresswoman **Marjorie Taylor Greene**, who said point blank that they would get even with cooperating companies and even "get rid of them." When Fox echoed the threat, it became more than an idle, however inappropriate, casual comment by an intellectual lightweight like McCarthy whose obeisance is reserved for **Donald Trump** (the fountainhead of intimidation in modern politics). When Fox echoed it, they signaled that the threat was to be taken seriously as it is being officially stated as Republican policy.

Let's all recall that Trump's politics by intimidation has been at the center of American politics for the past six-plus years. We've become so familiar with this style that now we barely raise an eyebrow at the outrageous lies perpetuated in the body politic. We gloss over not only the "Big Lie" that Trump's election was "stolen," but also the hundreds of minor and major ways we've witnessed in **Mitch McConnell's** running of the Senate, and how Republicans have led the fight to avoid vaccinations and mask wearing, and how the destruction they have wrought to their own constituencies has gone unchecked. (As I wrote last week, I think it's criminal!)

For several reasons, I believe that McCarthy's attempt to intimidate the business community will likely fail: 1) the whole nation is watching, so any company that buckles under will face a huge negative backlash from a public that *wants* to get the truth about what happened on January 6<sup>th</sup>; 2) the legal system won't let any company fail to respond to lawfully issued subpoenas no matter what intimidation tactics the Republicans employ; 3) the overwhelming majority, by my estimate 90 percent or more, of business dollars are betting that the rule of law will ultimately prevail over intimidation and hence it will be safe to resist Republican intimidation; and, 4) CEOs of significant companies didn't get to the top of the business world by letting politicians tell them how to run their businesses—they don't "cow" easily.

McCarthy's threats however do raise another, far more significant threat. He's raising the specter that the US government will pick companies that will prosper through affiliation with Republican politics, and that all others are subject to annihilation. This sounds to me like how the Nazis, on the verge of bankruptcy, were bailed out by German industrialists in 1933. As you may recall, many German companies chose to aid and abet the rise of Hitler in return for greater economic gains. Hitler put it very succinctly at a private meeting in Berlin on February 20, 1933, when he said, "Private enterprise cannot be maintained in a democracy." In other words, get rid of democracy if you want to stay in business.

In response, according to Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, who was chief UN Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials, the businesses in attendance pledged the equivalent of \$30 million in today's dollars to eliminate Hitler's debts, provide financing for the new Nazi régime that was being planned, and set up a financing framework which did not end until all of Germany was existentially threatened by 1945. You know their names, led by IG Farber (they got to sell the gas for the chambers and so-o-o much more) and Krupp (who got to make lots of weapons).

In hindsight, regardless of how venal those business decisions were, they clearly were *really bad* as business decisions.

My point is that whenever fascism links up with corporations for common purpose we get the worst possible outcome: corporate statism governed by fascists, and not shareholders OR the public. Lest anyone think this concern is hyperbolic, let's recall George Santayana's potent words: "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it." Business cannot, and in my view will not, bend to what a friend refers to as: "thug-ocracy." Government by thugs for the benefit of thugs. In many ways, that's where we're heading as a nation. And unfortunately, fascism is far worse.

The dictionary's definition of fascism reads:

"Fascism is authoritarian ultranationalism characterized by dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition, and strong regimentation of society and of the economy, which came to prominence in early 20th-century Europe."

By that definition, what McCarthy is doing is worse even than "thug-ocracy," and even worse than the standard Italian mob tactics normally employed by Trump (i.e., sign up to support "The Don" no matter what and you become part of the protected "family"). Resist and you'll be destroyed). McCarthy is literally paving the way for fascism and warning the corporate world, just like Hitler did in February of 1933, to "get on board" or bear the consequences of being severely damaged, or even destroyed, by the political system.

And so, I ask, *Quo Vadis?* Where are (we) going?

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