

Taking down Trumpism from Africa: Delegitimation, not collaboration, please

Patrick Bond 9 Feb 2017

In the US there are already effective Trump boycotts seeking to delegitimise his political agenda. Internationally, protesters will be out wherever he goes. And from Africa, there are sound arguments to play a catalytic role, mainly because the most serious threat to humanity and environment is Trump's climate change denialism.

Consider two contrasting strategies to deal with the latest mutation of US imperialism: we should protest Donald Trump and Trumpism at every opportunity as a way to contribute to the unity of the world's oppressed people, and now more urgently link our intersectional struggles; or we should somehow take advantage of his presidency to promote the interests of the 'left' or the 'Global South' where there is overlap in weakening Washington's grip (such as in questioning exploitative world trading regimes).

The latter position is now rare indeed, although before the election Hillary Clinton's commitment to militaristic neoliberalism generated so much opposition that to some, the anticipated 'paleo-conservatism' of an isolationist-minded Trump appeared attractive. One international analyst of great reknown, Boris Kagarlitsky, [makes](#) this same argument this week largely because Trump is questioning pro-corporate 'free trade' deals. But the argument for selective cooperation with Trump was best articulated in *Pambazuka* as part of a series of otherwise compelling reflections by the Ugandan writer and former South Centre director Yash Tandon.

Tandon might re-examine the 'space' he can 'seize' with Trump, the 'fraud'

Since more than any other individual Tandon helped [make](#) the 1999 Seattle and Cancun World Trade Organisation summits a profound disaster for world elites, I take him very seriously. (And yes, we've [debated](#) vigorously here before, e.g. the matter of South African and BRICS 'sub-imperialism,' a category he [denies](#).)

In his most recent *Pambazuka* [article](#), Tandon draws on the example of US democratic-socialist senator Bernie Sanders who – in the immediate aftermath of the shocking Trump 'victory' in last November's presidential election – "promised to work with Trump provided he saves the social safety nets." Tandon [reports](#): "Can those of us who are in the Global South take a leaf out of Sanders' book: seize the space provided by the change in the US Presidency?"

For the record, Sanders did indeed [make](#) such conciliatory sounds on November 9, purely on the grounds of Trump's electoral posturing – his 'anti-globalist' populist rhetoric proved attractive to a portion of the white working class – but by February 5, Sanders knew enough about how Trump governs to [offer](#) the opposite view:

"This guy's a fraud. It is hard not to laugh to see President Trump sitting alongside these Wall Street guys. This guy ran for the President of the United States saying, 'I'm Donald Trump and I'm gonna take on Wall Street—these guys are getting away with murder...' But suddenly he appoints all these billionaires; his major financial adviser comes from Goldman Sachs; and now he's gonna dismantle legislation that protects consumers. This is a guy who ran for president saying, 'I'm the only Republican who's not going to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid'—and then he appoints all of these guys who are precisely going to cut Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid... he's gonna sell out the middle class and the working class of this country."

Fraud extends beyond the befuddled sections of the US white working class whose support Trump won with promises to bring back jobs and fight Wall Street, to those who believed he would not be as prone to imperialist wars as Hillary Clinton. Squarely in this camp, Tandon makes the case that "we must distinguish between two very different species of nationalisms – one offensive and the other defensive." The former includes classical fascist movements, and the latter includes "the anti-colonial struggle for liberation from the European Empire."

Tandon acknowledges how 'aggressive nationalism' is imperialist and that "Its most virulent organisational expression is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)... if Trump does act on his ideas to question NATO and to talk with Russia (on matters related to Europe and the Middle East), then we in the South (like Sanders) should cooperate with him." This rests on Tandon's quaint [belief](#) that "Trump is for peace and diplomatic resolution of international conflicts."

Cooperate – with the world’s greatest-ever conman? No thanks, for not only did Trump do a [U-turn](#) on February 7, saying “We strongly support Nato,” he committed a site visit to Europe in May to prove that support.

Trump’s fraudulent extreme-imperialism is now evident. Within weeks of his ‘election,’ Trump had sworn in a Cabinet and top advisors consisting of maniacal generals, climate denialists, racists, billionaire super-exploiters and Goldman Sachs bankers. On January 27, Trump tried to ban desperate refugees and also 220 million Muslims from even transiting the US. He encouraged further Israeli attacks on Palestinians and 6000 new illegal West Bank settlement units, and last week approved a military raid on Yemen, killing 30 civilians, thus continuing Obama’s terror regime.

Now possessing nuclear weapons, he threatened to initiate war with China and Iran, and promised much higher US military spending (already \$600 billion+ annually) – while the Pentagon’s Africa Command operates in 40 countries, allied with notorious dictators.

He authorised a mega-wall on Mexico’s border – and he claims he’ll stick the Mexicans with the bill, compelling its (right-wing) president to cancel a meeting – and he proposed military intervention in Mexico’s drug war. And he plans to reverse slowly-normalising Cuba relations and to end the nuclear deal with Iran (which were rare accomplishments by Obama), as well as to overthrow Venezuela’s democratic government, and to re-open torture centres in allied dictatorships.

Here’s where I hope Tandon considers his own U-turn, and then rallies a broader set of forces against Trump. Mistakenly in my view, Tandon defines the ‘Global South’ as “Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.” Even slightly nuanced class analysis would distinguish those like myself – sitting in a Wits University office in Johannesburg – as Global North, from those like the (mostly African-American) water activists in Detroit and Flint, Michigan, fighting the most elemental battles of their lives, for affordable, clean municipal water?

Surely they are in the Global South? If so, for years to come you will read about their travails and campaigns against Trump at *Pambazuka*, through articles by writers like Beverly Bell (on “[fighting white power](#)”) or Kali Akuno and Doug Norberg (on [transcending](#) NGOist reform tendencies). Or at *Black Agenda Report*, tune into Glenn Ford and Nellie Bailey [reporting](#) on white-nationalist supremacy resurgent. And let’s keep in mind, as Mike Davis [does](#), that big chunks of the white working class that supported Trump are now in rapid heartbreak mode – perhaps ready to turn to another Sanders-type insurgency. And that process probably starts in the Democratic Party’s race this week for leadership, potentially moving quickly leftwards with the likely [election](#) of a progressive African-American Muslim, Keith Ellison.

Solidarity surely entails considering these allies ahead of the likes of Narendra Modi (the Trump-style extremist running India), Michel Temer (Brazil’s coup leader) or Vladimir Putin – whom Trump will probably attract into all sorts of sordid arrangements (e.g. in Syria and Eastern Europe), especially if Washington continues its warring ways. The wedge being driven by [Trump into the heart of the BRICS](#) is just one feature of the divide-and-conquer approach he will use when bullying the South.

Many US women just joined the Global South, too, as Trump has appointed a reactionary (Neil Gorsuch) as Supreme Court justice, mandating that he deny US women their hard-fought reproductive rights. He has put notorious privatiser Betsy DeVos and dogmatic Christian fundamentalist Jerry Falwell Jr in charge of public education. His reign began on January 20 by reversing reforms made by Obama in health insurance and revoked a R400 per month mortgage bond subsidy to working-class people. He has threatened to remove LGBTI rights and began rolling back consumer protection against predatory activities by corrupt banks. He promised to cut corporate taxes from 32% to below 20% and not prosecute illicit financial outflows.

We are all in the Global South in terms of the climate change Trump has catalysed, by re-activating oil pipelines (Keystone XL, Dakota Access) in spite of mass protest led by indigenous peoples. He appointed climate denialists to top environmental regulatory positions, so as to desecrate local, national and even global laws protecting nature and society from corporate pollution. And he has told endless lies, relentlessly cyber-bullied via Twitter, revealed psychotic-level narcissism, and, in sum, represented the highest-profile sexism, racism and xenophobia in recent world history.

Instead of cooperation, formidable opposition

Does it make sense to prepare for a global Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement against Donald Trump, his leading cronies in the Cabinet, their companies and United States corporations more generally?

If not immediately, there is a need to discuss this strategy very soon – so the arguments and nuances should be rehearsed regularly.

When it comes to raising the costs of Trump's noxious politics internationally and preventing corporations from full cohesion to his program, the US oppressed still must take the lead. Evidence of this is already emerging, with mutual aid commitments like the new [United Resistance](#) movement linking dozens of campaigning groups and 'sanctuary cities' ([hated](#) by the far right) offer close-to-home "social self-defence," as activist Jeremy Brecher [remarks](#). There are already effective Trump boycotts seeking to delegitimise his political agenda and companies that support it.

And internationally, we can predict that when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson takes trips or Trump attends the Hamburg G20 in July, [protesters](#) will be out. Trump may well back out of the scheduled trip to Britain in June due to formidable opposition.

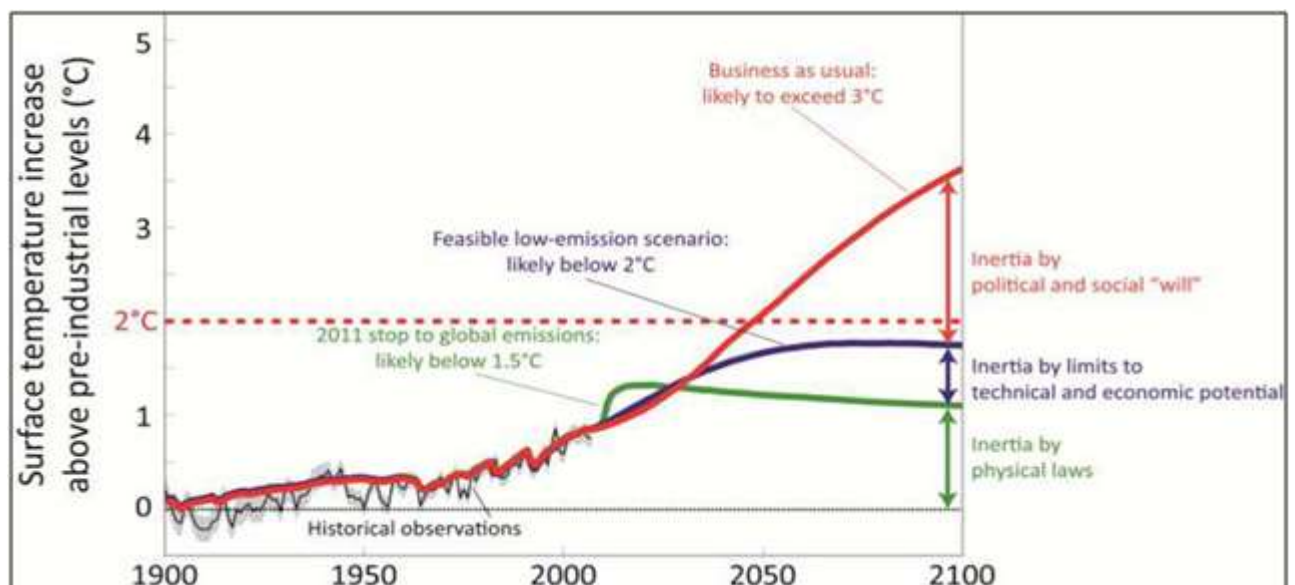
But from Africa, there are sound arguments to also play a catalytic role, mainly because the most serious threat to humanity and environment, aside from the [return](#) of first-strike nuclear fantasies, is Trump's climate change denialism and new spikes in US greenhouse gas emissions from deregulated fossil fuels and filthy infrastructure. [According](#) to Mithika Mwenda, Secretary General of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), "It is the people of the US who should make Trump retract his dangerously populist proclamation as he now is a leader of the most powerful nation." But if that does not succeed, international solidarity will be needed to strengthen the US movements.

The rest of this article:

- reviews Trump's threats to the climate;
- considers sanctions and how they might work against Trump and US megacorporations;
- reminds of the recent history of climate sanctions and carbon-tax advocacy;
- lists some Trump-related corporations to potentially target; and
- concludes with a hopeful precedent – anti-apartheid sanctions that allowed black South Africans and their allies to wedge global and local capital away from a fascist state.

First, what will it take to solve the climate crisis? There are technicist strategies to lower greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy, transport, agriculture and forestry, urbanisation, production, consumption and disposal. But the overwhelming change required will be to overcome what has been [termed](#) "inertia by political and social will."

As climate change evidence gathers pace, so has awareness. By last November, the Yale University Program on Climate Change Communication poll of US registered voters [found](#) that 78% supported taxing or regulating emissions, and 69% agreed this should happen in an international agreement.





But last November in another poll, Trump was elected president. In four states – Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Nevada – the margin required to reverse the result was a total of just 55,000 votes. Trump won the electoral college but lost the national popular vote by nearly three million votes. Supported by only 45 percent of those who voted (and 25.3% of the overall potential electorate), his popularity [rating](#) was just 37 percent a week before taking office and then [fell](#) to 32% on inauguration day; in 2009, Barack Obama had an 84% approval just as he entered the White House.

The huge protests – e.g. four million people worldwide on 21 January in solidarity with women critics of Trump – gave him no mandate for climate change denialism. Yet this is the new government’s ‘default position,’ [says](#) Trump’s chief of staff Reince Preibus.

The other areas in which we can anticipate Trump’s climate policies to quickly affect the world, according to his 100-day [plan](#), are resurgent climate denialism; filthy-Keynesian infrastructure construction (fossil-fuel pipelines, airports, roads and bridges); cancellation of international obligations (e.g. withdrawing from the United Nations climate treaty and payment obligations to the Green Climate Fund); retraction of shale gas restrictions and the Keystone pipeline ban; destruction of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); and a (futile) attempt to “save the coal industry.” After that, expect [privatization](#) of public land including Native reservations, in search of more oil.

#Boycott Exxon
#ChildrenRNot4Sale

THE ARCTIC IS MELTING. AND
#ExxonKnew 25 YEARS AGO.

"AN EXTENDED OPEN WATER SEASON, [EXXON RESEARCHER] SAID IN 1993, COULD POTENTIALLY REDUCE EXPLORATORY DRILLING AND PRODUCTION COSTS BY 30% TO 50%."

— LOS ANGELES TIMES, OCT. 3, 2017, "WHAT EXXON KNEW ABOUT THE MELTING ARCTIC."

Big Business's support for Common Core is grounded in seeing your children as commodities they own.

ExxonMobil

"I'm not sure public schools understand that we're their customer—that we, the business community, are your customer. What they don't understand is they are producing a product at the end of that high school graduation. Now is that product in a form that we, the customer, can use it? Or is it defective, and we're not interested?"
— Rex Tillerson, CEO, Exxon

Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson thinks of our children as his products. Exxon knew about climate change. Join us!

#ExxonKnew

His choices for the main climate-related Cabinet positions left no room for doubt: Tillerson as Secretary of State, Scott Pruitt as EPA Director, Rick Perry as Secretary of Energy and Ryan Zinke as Secretary of the Interior. Tillerson was not only a major [contributor](#) to climate policy inertia over several decades as an ExxonMobil leader. More recently his contract for a massive \$500 billion Siberian oil drill earned him the Russian 'Order of Friendship' from Vladimir Putin in 2013. A year later, the deal was postponed due to sanctions that followed Putin's 2014 invasion of the Crimea in the wake of the US-financed ([\\$5 billion](#)) overthrow of Ukraine's pro-Russian leader. Even without Tillerson at the helm, ExxonMobil is anticipated to remain a very strong target for environmental boycotters.

But beyond specific firms, the challenge will be to address Trumpism's malevolent power, all over the world. As much as any issue area, climate change offers that opportunity because the products of corporations in the US – more than in any other country – are tainted by the world's highest historic emissions of greenhouse gases.

Before assessing Trump's climate destruction, consider a thought experiment: had Clinton been elected president and under her rule had US corporations continued to pollute without any accountability or penalty (one of several fatal flaws in the Paris Agreement, a deal which climate scientist James Hansen [defined](#) as 'bullshit!') – then would the world have been in a position to react? The election's silver lining may be more effective activism.

Simply put, Trump's election gives the world impetus to belatedly develop a BDS strategy in a way that activists should have been doing since at least 1992, when President George HW Bush [told](#) the Rio Earth Summit "The American way of life is not up for negotiations."

The climate case for BDS

Conceptual tools needed to boycott US exports on grounds of climate change have been around for years. Already in 2006, Nobel economic prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz [argued](#), "unless the US goes along with the rest of the world, unless producers in America face the full cost of their emissions, Europe, Japan and all the countries of the world should impose trade sanctions against the US." A technical policy term for such sanctions emerged: "border adjustment taxes" or for short, border measures which [avoid](#) World Trade Organisation anti-protectionist penalties (i.e., such taxes are not a "disguised trade restriction").

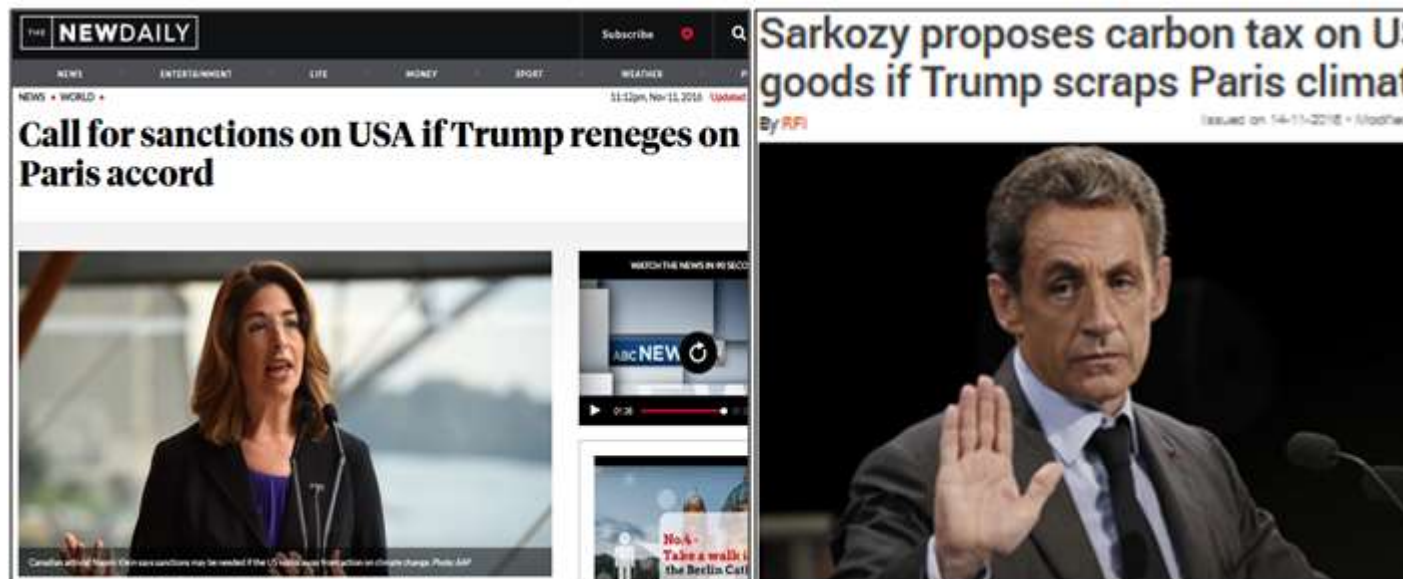
By 2009, US President Barack Obama promoted carbon trading strategies within his ultimately-unsuccessful pro-market legislative strategy (to "privatize the air" by letting the rich pay to pollute), in

order that big corporations would agree to emissions caps. Establishment economists like the Peterson Institute's Gary Hufbauer and Jisun Kim [observed](#) that in such a context, US companies "paying to pollute" would need additional protection from outside competitors: "border measures seem all but certain for political reasons... many US climate bills introduced in the Congress have included border measures: they limit imports from countries that do not have comparable climate policies."

Due to Republican Party climate denialism, the 'cap-and-trade' legislation failed in 2009-10, and although Obama gained allies for a new non-binding, market-friendly agreement at the Copenhagen UN summit in 2009, it was only in 2015 that the UN Paris Climate Agreement finally emerged as the first all-in deal.

But when last November, Trump's victory squelched any prospect of Paris being implemented by his government – hence confirming the impossibility of the goal of lowering the temperature increase above pre-industrial times to 1.5 Centigrade degrees, all hope evaporated for the subsequent UN negotiations that had just begun in Marrakesh, Morocco. Widener Law School climate specialist Donald Brown [reported](#): "I heard participants proclaim defiantly that they were going to 'Trump Proof' the world. They claimed they were going to go ahead with or without the United States. Several claimed that if the US pulled out of the Paris deal, they would pursue economic sanctions against the US."

Climate justice advocate Naomi Klein [reacted](#): "We need to start demanding economic sanctions in the face of this treaty-shedding lawlessness." Representing French business, conservative ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy [threatened](#), "I will demand that Europe put in place a carbon tax at its border, a tax of 1-3 percent, for all products coming from the US, if the US doesn't apply environmental rules that we are imposing on our companies." In a front page story, the *New York Times* [quoted](#) a leading Mexican official in Marrakesh: "A carbon tariff against the US is an option for us. We will apply any kind of policy necessary to defend the quality of life for our people, to protect our environment and to protect our industries," a point echoed by a Canadian official.



Can Trump be badgered by corporate campaigns?

"Honey badger don't give a shit!," according to a slogan that has motivated Breitbart.com's reckless 'journalists' since the time of the late maniacal founder Andrew Breitbart. Its subsequent leader Steve Bannon – now Trump senior political advisor and the man considered to be the 'brains' behind Trump's most aggressive acts – appears to carry that gonzo style directly into the White House. (The phrase comes from a [youtube](#) video about a 'crazy nastyass' African animal unnerved by danger.)

Sometimes a thin-skinned Trump does indeed give a shit, most recently [defending](#) clothing retailer LL Bean against the [#grabyourwallet](#) boycott of scores of Trump-related firms. Setting aside the myriad personal pin-pricks from which journalists and politicians have drawn blood, what kinds of activist and legal attacks on Trump's business have truly tripped him up and reversed his course? Decades worth of extreme real estate corruption, property gambles, debt defaults and full-fledged bankruptcies, refusals to pay suppliers and tax chiselling have reportedly attracted more than [4000](#) lawsuits.

Trump retailer boycotts

<https://grabyourwallet.org> receives up to 100,000 unique visits per week and monitors inventories of companies, immediately dropping them from the list once it's been verified that official Trump products are no longer available. To date, five retailers were dropped from the #GrabYourWallet list. (14 January 2017)

RETAILERS TO BOYCOTT

6pm.com

Amazon

Bed Bath & Beyond

Belk.com

Bloomingdale's

Bluefly

Bon-Ton

Build.com

Burlington Coat Factory

Buy Buy Baby

Carson's

Century 21 Dept. Store

Dillard's

DSW

Elder Beerman

Filene's Basement

Gilt

Heels.com

Hudson Bay

HSN

Jet

Kmart

Lord & Taylor

Macy's

Marshalls

Neiman Marcus

Nordstrom

Nordstrom Rack

Overstock.com

Perfumania

Ross

Saks Off Fifth

Sears

ShopStyle.com & ShopStyleUK

Stein Mart

TJ Maxx

Walmart

Winners

Zappos

OTHERS TO BOYCOTT: REASON

ABC Supply: CEO raised funds for Trump and/or for Trump super PAC

Breitbart “News”: Hate speech site that propagated fake news about Trump’s opponents during election

Carnival Corporation: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of which Donald is Executive Producer

The New Celebrity Apprentice: Donald is executive producer of this NBC show

Forbes.com: CEO supports Trump

Hobby Lobby: Company CEO endorsed Trump

The Honest Company: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of which Donald is Executive Producer

Kawasaki: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of which Donald is Executive Producer

King’s Hawaiian: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of which Donald is Executive Producer

Kushner Properties: Owner Jared Kushner led Trump’s campaign

L.A. Clippers: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice

LendingTree: CEO raised funds for Trump SuperPAC

LL Bean: Company board member raised funds for Trump PAC

Lorissa's Kitchen: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice

MillerCoors: CEO raised funds for Trump and/or for Trump super PAC

NASCAR: CEO Endorsed Trump

New Balance: Retailer that Has Expressed Public Support for Donald Trump

National Enquirer: Media outlet that endorsed Trump & prevented negative news about Trump from being released

People Magazine: Media outlet that normalized Trump at a pivotal moment

QVC: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of Which Donald Trump is Executive Producer

Scion Hotels: Trump-Owned, Branded, or Operated Business

See's Candies: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of Which Donald Trump is Executive Producer

Trident: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of Which Donald Trump is Executive Producer

Trump Golf Courses: Trump-Owned, Branded, or Operated Business

Trump Hotels: Trump-Owned, Branded, or Operated Business

Trump Winery: Trump-Owned, Branded, or Operated Business

Tyra Beauty: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of Which Donald Trump is Executive Producer

Uline: CEO raised funds for Trump and/or for Trump super PAC

Ultimate Fighting Championship: President endorsed Trump

Universal Studios Hollywood: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of Which Donald Trump is Executive Producer

Welch's: Advertiser on Celebrity Apprentice, of Which Donald Trump is Executive Producer

Yuengling Beer: Founder endorsed Trump



More rarely, however, there are popular victories that reveal Trump's weaknesses in political battle. Within the past year, former students at Trump University who claimed their \$35,000 annual education was fraudulent won an out of court settlement of \$25 million. A month later, Trump backed down from trade union disputes against his Las Vegas hotel.

Also in 2016 he was forced to drop out of a Brazilian construction branding deal due to local corruption, and in Ireland he also acknowledged defeat when a snail's survival compelled local environmental regulators to halt his wall-building (against sea level rise) at a golf course. Trump's giant ego, public relations gaffes and inevitable allegations of business misconduct draw his firms towards such chaos like a moth to a flame.

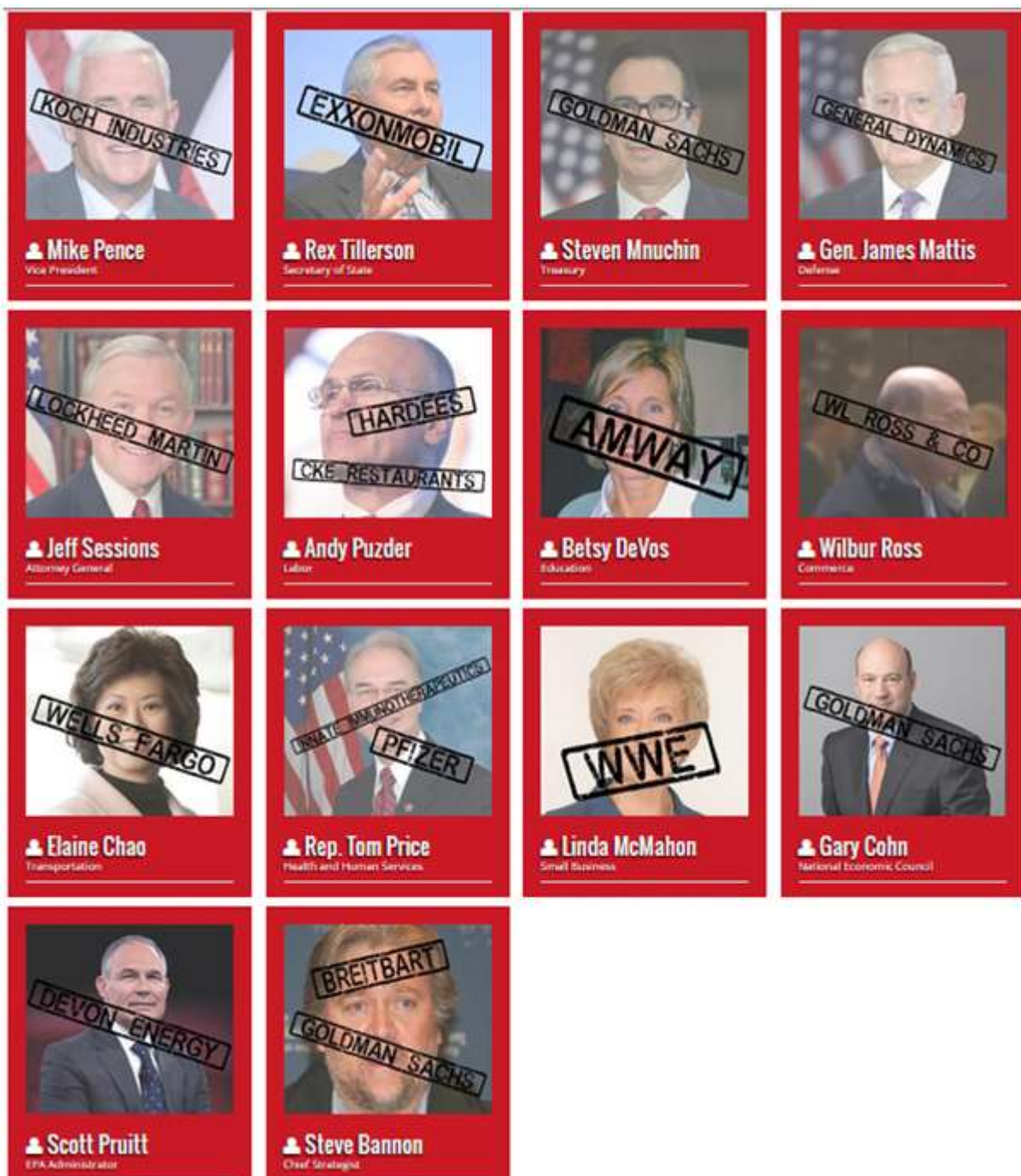
Trump company targets will continue to be relevant, especially because the new president [refuses](#) to divest any of his holdings, thus ensuring coming years of activist protests and court hearings over conflicts of interest. What other corporate targets are logical for consumers and sympathetic states worldwide, are vulnerable to brand damage associated with BDS strategy, and will most adversely affect Trump and his cronies?

Grievances against Trump family-firm holdings are legion, but *political* attacks on Trump-associated companies are even more important. In February 2016, for example, the e-activist network Color of Change [directed](#) its Trump campaigning against one of the world's largest companies because of its sponsorship of last year's Republican Party convention: "How can Coca-Cola, a company that heavily markets to and profits from Black people, fund a platform for a presidential nominee that is being bolstered into office by former Grand Wizard David Duke, the KKK, and other white supremacists?"

The petition was signed by 100,000. Within three weeks, Coca-Cola had agreed to withhold \$600,000 it had earlier earmarked to help pay for the Cleveland convention.

Another example was the 'Sleeping Giants' Twitter network of several thousand activists which since last November discovered that [more than 1000](#) major firms and non-profit institutions were advertising (most without being aware) on the [breitbart.com](#) white nationalist website. Their attempts to confront these firms by sending a screenshot were remarkably successful, and led to 400 withdrawing the adverts.

But there are, in contrast, mega-corporations anxious to pick up vast new contracts with the US government, reflecting the 9 percent increase in the Dow Jones stock market index after November 8, [led](#) by banking, oil and military firms. Trump's cabinet and top officials are from Goldman Sachs bank, ExxonMobil oil, Koch Industries oil, Lockheed Martin military, Pfizer drugs, General Dynamics military, Wells Fargo bank, Amway beauty, Hardees food and Breitbart media.



Precedents against not a person (Trump) but a system (Trumpism)

How far have dominant US politics slid to the far right? Trump only received 25.3 percent of the eligible vote, yet there can be no mistaking how Washington's state-corporate power now fuses multiple reactionary political, socio-cultural and economic forces into a [US version](#) of neo-fascism.

To be sure, conflicts will continue rising between Trumpism and moderate Republicanism, the neo-liberals and liberal Democratic elites, the so-called [Deep State](#) opponents (especially in the Central Intelligence Agency) and neoconservative factions of the military, and increasingly in 2017, deficit hawks. Probably though, these won't reach break point. If they do, a Trumpism-without-Trump may well be the result. If Trump is removed from the presidency by a faction of the Deep State or a bloc representing Koch interests, they will simply have concluded that Michael Pence would far better [serve](#) their interests.

Could a smart-sanctions campaign against the corporations undergirding Trumpism (not just Trump) be effective? [According](#) to the *Washington Post*, already by February 3 the momentum included a reversal by major retailer Nordstrom (no longer carrying the Ivanka line): "The pressure to take an anti-Trump stand is especially acute in the left-leaning technology world. After attempting to reach out to Trump by attending a meeting with him in New York, CEOs are girding for a high-stakes confrontation with the sitting president" over his xenophobia.

If some of these Trump cabinet-linked firms – e.g. Goldman Sachs, ExxonMobil, Koch Industries, Lockheed Martin, Pfizer – are the most likely targets of a people’s smart-sanctions strategy, there are some lessons to be learned from prior BDS campaigns.

Current BDS-from-below targets include Israel due to its legal and human rights violations in Palestine, and the world fossil fuel industry which faces an ‘unburnable carbon’ financial crisis known as ‘stranded assets,’ in which investment managers’ fiduciary responsibility is to *not* invest in firms which falsely state the value of their coal, oil and gas assets. The Dakota Access Pipe Line battle partially won by mass action last December also has a parallel divestment fight underway against the pipeline’s bankers.

In both cases, the stigmatization strategy has worked to some extent, and often, the divestment tactic has been financially painful to the target.

Making the process as democratic as possible is vital. In 2006, 170 Palestinian civil society groups initiated BDS, insisting on three unifying demands: the retraction of illegal Israeli settlements (a demand won in the Gaza Strip) and the end of the West Bank Occupation and Gaza siege; cessation of racially-discriminatory policies towards the million and a half Palestinians living within Israel; and a recognition of Palestinians’ right to return to residences dating to the 1948 ethnic cleansing when the Israeli state was established.

One result has been an attempt by Zionists – including in powerful US state agencies – to stigmatize those who advocate BDS (e.g. as ‘anti-Semitic’), an indication of how great a threat BDS may become to an unjust order known by its critics as ‘Israeli apartheid.’

Against this, [says](#) BDS-Israel co-founder Omar Barghouti, “Boycott remains the most morally sound, non-violent form of struggle that can rid the oppressor of his oppression, thereby allowing true coexistence, equality, justice and sustainable peace to prevail. South Africa attests to the potency and potential of this type of civil resistance.”

In South Africa, the crime against humanity known as apartheid was a form of fascism in which state power, corporate profitability and the racist, patriarchal and ecologically destructive cultural elite within white society exercised power, refusing the masses’ demands for “one person, one vote in a unitary state.” [BDS](#) was one part of the resistance.

[According](#) to Ronnie Kasrils – a leader of the underground movement and from 2004-08 the South African Minister of Intelligence – “BDS made apartheid’s beneficiaries feel the pinch in their pocket and their polecat status whether in the diplomatic arena, on the sporting fields, at academic or business conventions, in the world of theatre and the arts, in the area of commerce and trade and so on. Arms sanctions weakened the efficiency of the SA Defence Force; divestment by trade unions and churches affected the economy as did the termination of banking ties by the likes of Chase Manhattan and Barclays banks; boycott of products from fruit to wine saw a downturn in trade; the disruption of sports events was a huge psychological blow; dockworkers refusing to handle ship’s cargoes disrupted trade links.”

Internally, protests in townships and trade unions catalyzed global support for intensified financial sanctions in 1985. They peaked when at the Durban City Hall on August 15 that year, apartheid boss PW Botha [addressed](#) his National Party and an internationally televised audience of 200 million with his belligerent “Rubicon Speech.” He refused to budget on demands to end apartheid.

Realizing the Trumpian character of Botha, Pretoria’s frightened international creditors – subject to intense activist pressure – began calling in loans early. Facing a run on the SA Reserve Bank’s hard currency, Botha [defaulted](#) on \$13 billion of debt payments coming due, shut the stock market and imposed exchange controls. Within days, leading English-speaking businessmen Gavin Relly, Zac de Beer and Tony Bloom began [dismantling](#) their decades-old *de facto* alliance with the Pretoria regime, met African National Congress (ANC) leaders in Lusaka, and helped engineer a [transition](#) that would free South Africa of racial (albeit not class) apartheid less than nine years later.

Botha was gone by 1989 but civil society ratcheted up anti-apartheid BDS even when his successor FW De Klerk offered reforms in February 1990, such as freeing Nelson Mandela and unbanning political parties. Proposed international bank loans to Pretoria for ostensibly ‘developmental’ purposes were rejected by activists, and threats were made: a future ANC government would default. It was only by fusing bottom-up pressure with top-down international delegitimization of white rule that the final barriers were cleared for the first free vote, in April 1994.

South Africa sanctions worked in part because they were initially conceptualized by Albert Luthuli in 1959: “The economic boycott of South Africa will entail undoubted hardship for Africans. We do not

doubt that. But if it is a method which shortens the day of bloodshed, the suffering to us will be a price we are willing to pay.” They developed through alliances of South African leaders like Luthuli and Mandela, with British supporters and US civil rights movement leader Martin Luther King. By 1962, the first of many UN resolutions called for sanctions against apartheid.

The ANC-influenced Congress of South African Trade Unions [endorsed](#) BDS as “an *essential and effective form* of pressure” even though in the short term it would cost them jobs. The main opposition to BDS from black South Africans was from Bantustan collaborators, who promoted their own much narrower reform strategy for multinational corporations active in South Africa (the “Sullivan Principles” from which even Leon Sullivan [retreated](#) in 1987 due to Botha’s intransigence).

The main point to reflect on is the strategic wedge driven between white (‘english-speaking’) Johannesburg capitalists and racist (‘Afrikaner’) Pretoria regime. As internal protest surged, it was the 1985 foreign debt crisis caused in part by BDS which broke the capital-state alliance and compelled South Africa’s nine-year transition to democracy.

With Trumpism such a logical target of BDS-USA, international solidarity to weaken that power requires a boycott of both high-profile state functionaries and key corporations in order to attack the legitimacy of profits made within a [neo-fascist](#), climate-denialist USA. As Public Citizen’s Rob Weissman [warns](#), the US faces “a government literally of the Exxons, by the Goldman Sachs and for the Kochs.” Several dozen leading US activist groups have offered much-needed mutual solidarity as ‘[United Resistance](#),’ which perhaps will soon add an international component to its army.

Trump and his cronies are rapidly taking power in Washington, and in doing so they are currently battling Washington’s ‘[Deep State](#)’ over his pro-Russian perspective, as well as all Democratic elites and many from the Republican Party. He or at least the Koch/Cheney faction of Trumpism will likely win. At that point, when their threats to the climate and US oppressed people’s human rights become undeniable, can they then be challenged by the US and world progressive movements?

Certainly one way to test how powerful Trumpism may become, is to tackle it where its Achilles Heel stands out most – climate change – and with a well-tested strategy and tactics: BDS USA.

Nelson Mandela helped popularize use of sanctions

The use of sanctions against South Africa’s apartheid-era government was effective and became a model for applying international pressure. But the tactic has been ineffective in many cases since.

December 06, 2013 | By Paul Richter

WASHINGTON — His greatest impact was as a moral leader, but Nelson Mandela also left a legacy in diplomacy by helping popularize the use of international sanctions to pressure a government to change its policies.

Since sanctions were imposed in an effort to end apartheid and bring down South Africa’s white-minority government, they have been used hundreds of times, especially by Western countries. President Clinton, who ordered sanctions against Cuba, Libya, Iran and Pakistan, mused near the end of his second term that the United States had become “sanctions-happy.”



A policeman responds to members of the Black Sash anti-apartheid organization... (Guy Tillim / AFP/Getty Images)



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