

# Conservatives, Liberals and Progressives

July 10  
Hello all,

I'm attaching something I've been thinking about for the past couple of days. I'd appreciate any feedback or comments you all can provide. I'm also attaching it as a Word document if you'd prefer to comment directly on that. It's very rough but it also draws on a political analysis we've been building collectively so I wanted to share it with you.

Michael

## **What We Share When We Share Chris Uhlmann's Video**

In a video that has now gone viral, Chris Uhlmann, a Australian journalist "[demolishes](#)" Trump in the aftermath of the G20. The incident appears to resonate with a younger generation of "progressive" millennials, and therefore provides some insight into the political analysis of a rising generation in the US right now. Young liberals are going to be talking about this, the ones joining the DSA in droves, the Bernie Bros from college campuses, the urban farmers-cum-real estate agents that are Instagram-famous in Detroit at the moment. Some of Uhlmann's Twitter followers, the ones I also follow, include Anna Clark, Hend Amry, and Lil B, who are, respectively, a Detroit-based progressive journalist, the "Queen of Muslim Twitter," and a hip hop artist hip among hipsters that endorsed Bernie Sanders in the 2016 presidential election.

That is the social milieu on the leading edge of Uhlmann's political influence in the United States, people that may have followed Uhlmann before this episode or may have begun following him due to the viral spread of the video around the Internet. But follow him they do. In the US, people like this constitute a progressive milieu. But in the context of Australian politics, Uhlmann has a history as a conservative politician. I'm not at all familiar with Australian politics so what follows is a very rough outline, but Uhlmann ran on a

national ticket with Paul Osborne in 1998. Osborne is a nationally prominent conservative Christian politician in Australia. It seems like they split over abortion during that election, with Uhlmann opposing an anti-abortion piece of legislation Osborne was championing. But the split may also have been precipitated by disagreements about Osborne's tactics in introducing the bill. This already raises an important question: what is the future of abortion among conservatives? Regardless of the reason for his split with Osborne, because of that split, Uhlmann has become a conservative but pro-abortion political figure in Australia. Note that neither the [New York Times](#) nor [Buzzfeed](#) list Uhlmann's political affiliation in their coverage of the incident. Socially liberal in some ways, Uhlmann remains firmly committed to Western "civilization" (read imperialism), guaranteed by military might against the "authoritarian" influence of Russia and China, two growing capitalist economies that also happen to have been politically implicated in the last "clash of civilizations." With this background in mind, we can make good sense of a screed against Trump by a conservative journalist from a Pacific Rim ally that seems visibly shaken by the possible future for the region Trump's policies portend.

While it has been described as a "[brutal](#)" (and [viral](#)) "takedown" of Trump, the video begins with Uhlmann agreeing with Trump that an "illness" has infected "Western democracies." Uhlmann's "takedown" begins *after* he aligns Australia civilizationally with the US and against Russia and China. That takedown amounts not to a political criticism of Trump's alignment with far-right, "[anti-state Leninists](#)" like Bannon, or AG Sessions' promise to ratchet up "[law and order](#)" in U.S. streets. Nor did it consist of a vision of democratic citizenship inspired by the movements across the Middle East and North Africa in recent years, touching US soil at Occupy Wall Street and reflected in the Black Lives Matter policy statement's demand for "[direct democracy](#)." Instead, Uhlmann stresses a crisis in leadership, claiming that Trump "has no desire and no capacity to lead the world." This thematic emphasis suggests the influence on contemporary conservatives not only of Lenin but also of Trotsky - who began his 1938 [transitional program](#) with the idea that "the world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." For most of the twentieth century, Marxists mostly argued among themselves about who should lead not the

proletariat but rather ever-tinier micro-sects of true believers. Trotsky's *Transitional Program* set the pattern but, as Uhlmann's approach demonstrates, it is characteristic of a broad swath of human beings, left and right, who do not believe in anything resembling the direct democracy so central to contemporary movements that have made serious political questions once again the order of the day in the United States and shaken, when not toppled, deeply entrenched governments globally.

In short order, Uhlmann ticks off a series of political positions. He castigates Trump for pulling the US out of the Paris climate agreement, calling the country "isolated and friendless" in the aftermath; advocates a muscular foreign policy against North Korea; nods to Trump's "scripted observations" in Poland, which the *National Review* [praised](#) for reaffirming the West's commitment to "universality" while Slate panned the speech as a [defense of white supremacy](#); calls Trump's Twitter account "bile" and condemns Trump's attacks on "the judiciary, independent agencies and the free press." Uhlmann then presses his argument about the decline of the US, suggesting that in the era of Trump's America, the rest of the world will be left searching for "the best way to work around him." Uhlmann's viral video seems to reflect real nervousness on the part of the US's Pacific allies about the future of the region, and a serious rebuke to the US for abdicating its leadership in the region, politically and economically, with Trump seeming to cede regional influence willingly to Russia and China.

That Uhlmann's video has gone viral sheds new light on the international scene as well as on the political turmoil among Democrats and Republicans in the US at the moment. The day after the meeting of the G20 concluded, the *New York Times* [ran a story](#) about the president's son, Donald Trump, Jr., meeting with a Russian lawyer after learning in an email that the lawyer had damaging information about Hillary Clinton's campaign. In light of that, it appears that the crisis surrounding Russian influence in the 2016 political campaign is only getting deeper. With Trump's political future in question, and no doubt left to international observers that he is clueless and incompetent, rising on nothing more substantive than "white privilege" and PR, it may be that we are on the verge of another political realignment of the two parties. In the 1930s, in the midst of the Great Depression, the Republicans transformed from the party of Lincoln to the party of big business,

while the Democrats managed to win black workers' political allegiance even as the southern wing of the party continued to defend white supremacy in the South, ironically at the same time as the nation ostensibly waged war against it in Hitler's Germany. Under that arrangement, the parties stabilized until a political revolution set in among both parties with Reagan's election. The latter sent Democrats scrambling to the right to catch up with Republicans' imperial agenda, neoliberal economic approach, and heinous approach to law-and-order. Out of this turmoil emerged the New Democrats, for whom Bill Clinton became the standard bearer in 1992, and remained until Obama's election.

But black politicians and non-black people of color have played an increasingly prominent role in the Democratic Party since Reagan's election. This was, after all, the party of Coleman Young and Maynard Jackson, Maxine Waters and John Conyers, and would become the party of [Julian Castro](#), [Thomas Perez](#) and [Keith Ellison](#), along with [Catherine Cortez Masto](#), [Tammy Duckworth](#) and [Kamala Harris](#). How do each of these rising Democrats feel about the place of the US in an increasingly multipolar world (some are military veterans); or about the global economic order the Democratic Party has aligned itself with under New Democrat leadership; or about policing in the United States. Both Harris and Cortez Masto, for example, have served as their home state's top cop. Are they [prison abolitionists](#)? Do they want to [disempower, disarm and disband the police](#)? What does the emergence of a new layer of leadership in the Democratic Party portend about the party's future political positions?

Among Democrats and Republicans, then, a number of cracks in the contemporary political alignment are emerging. Abortion is among the most prominent for Republicans. Tomi Lahren is a good example of the convergence of these issues. The *New York Times* called Lahren "[the Right's rising political star](#)" after Trump's election. Lahren even [appeared](#) on liberals' favorite news source, *The Daily Show*, an event that raised the hackles of more progressive Democrats. Lahren fell out with Glenn Beck after she publicly supported abortion on *The View*, [telling Whoopi](#), "I'm someone that's for limited government. So I can't sit here and be a hypocrite and say I'm for limited government but I think the government should decide what women do with their bodies." Lahren went on to compare the issue to gun control, suggesting a

tradeoff that seems incomprehensible for socially conservative Republicans: "stay out of my guns and you can stay out of my body as well." [One article](#) registered the tremors when it began, "The voice of millennial Republicans just had a major break from her party's position on reproductive rights" before going on to counsel against making her "a feminist ally." Moreover, while the position confused some Republicans, and provoked [scorn from Slate](#), Lahren found allies among the Alt-Right, and she could also gain some sympathy for suing Glenn Beck recently, who has defended scumbags like Bill O'Reilly from sexual harassment allegations. What does this conflict spell for Republicans' political futures?

And what about [the white working class](#), drinking itself to death in the Appalachian foothills when not overdosing on heroin or taking its own life? Just recently, the [22 million people](#) the Republican healthcare bill would leave uninsured have [run up against](#) the bill's tax cuts for the rich, causing even [Forbes magazine](#) to question the wisdom of those cuts, and [forcing Republicans to ask themselves questions about where the future of their party lies](#) that must seem very new.

Explicit reference to any kind of working class is absent in Uhlmann's diatribe, but he appears to support free trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and Trump's decision to withdraw from it - which [Forbes](#), [CNN](#), and the [Independent](#) agree is a boon to China - may also be reckoned in the background of the video. This, too, unsettles contemporary American politics. New Democrats like Obama and the Clintons have been some of the TPP's staunchest supporters. Meanwhile, renewable energy is flourishing in "[Trump country](#)," bringing along with it (some) jobs, substantial investment, and an infrastructure that would be difficult to move overseas.

What are the politics of people who find Uhlmann's video exciting? Do they support abortions and global action against climate change like the Paris Accords? What is their position on the imperial shadowboxing of the U.S. and its erstwhile allies in the Pacific Rim against China, Russia, and the continent of Africa, which China has been [carefully cultivating](#) for the past decade or more with infrastructure and other economic investment? Do they fear American decline and to what ends might they go to avoid that fate? Do they support all those [drone bombs](#) that blow [Afghani](#)

[wedding attendees](#) off the sides of mountains, 39 out of 47 of which were women and children? Do they call a pox on all national houses, as many anarchists do, and Rosa Luxemburg once did? Or do they support national liberation struggles in Central Asia, and the Middle East as positive developments, if simply because of the damage they do to national imperialisms, as Lenin? How is their position on American imperialism as "world police" reflected in their position on policing within the US? Does the latter assessment of law enforcement extend to the FBI and CIA? How do they feel about a multiracial political establishment presiding over global capitalism and its attendant machinery of war?

And, finally, to which millennium do millennials owe their political allegiance? The previous one, with its war mongering, patriarchy and white supremacy, homophobia, unprecedented economic inequality, and array of tessellated hierarchies among human beings sorted according to the social "privileges" that similar-looking people have accrued over the past 1,000 years? Or to a millennium that has barely begun, that has already seen direct democratic movements topple or terrify political regimes across the world, if only briefly; a millennium in which the future remains to be discussed and debated and fought for; a political future that at the very least, and in a way that has not seemed possible for a very long time, is up to us, this generation, to choose for ourselves rather than inherit from the past.

So which millennium belongs to us?

Michael

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July 13

All,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/g20-obsolete-trump-putin-russia-germany-france/533238/>

Here's an article on the [video](#) I mentioned in what I wrote that suggests that "the G20 is obsolete." In spite of this bold statement, the author seems to side with Chris Uhlmann, the journalist in the video, and other "restorationists" about how to stabilize the economic order the G20 represents in the Trump era.

It's hard to say whether the author is "liberal" or "conservative" but he seems to support using military might to maintain a global economic order favorable to the US and Western Europe and disfavorable to Russia and China.

He also agrees that the election of Trump signals the end of something significant at the world historical level and that it ratifies the emergence of a multipolar world.

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PS Note also that the author of the Atlantic article agrees with Uhlmann that Trump should have used the issue of North Korea to press NATO's case against Russia and China. This is the imperial thrust the two of them share.

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Attachments area

Preview YouTube video Donald Trump 'has no desire and no capacity to lead the world', Chris Uhlmann says



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July 13

Thanks Mike for your posting about Uhlmann. The existence of political figures like Uhlmann and the reception to his blasting Trump among the so called progressive milieu points to some important political developments globally that need to be recognized and discussed.

Uhlmann is an Australian Broadcasting Corp. celeb/ journalist of some standing. He is a conservative who has been married for the past 23 years to a major figure in the right wing of the Australian Labor Party. He was raised in a Communist family that came out of the Catholic sections of the Australian working class. His family over the years evolved to being Laborites but he has recently stated his father has now returned to an overt Communist stance. Before his career in journalism he was in the seminary. A critic of the church hierarchy, he left the path to the priesthood. His pro-abortion stance is a reflection of one aspect of that opposition. He still maintains a belief in god and supports the existence /need for the/a church.

As Mike noted he appeared on a conservative ticket with one Paul Osborne in 1998. This was billed as an insurgent conservative initiative independent of the established Conservative party. Osborne was an ex police detective who became a national rugby (possibly soccer, I can't recall) celebrity. I have no knowledge of how that episode played out.

The positive reception given his blast of Trump by the U.S. self styled progressive milieu from the wider youthful pro-Bernie layers to the MSNBC crowd comes as no surprise. As we well know Social Democracy and left liberalism has either been deeply entangled with "democratic" imperialism at its elite levels or its more left wing currents are either opportunistically compromised or naively muddled , unable to sharply break with it.

Bill's link to an organized grouping within the growing DSA is instructive. The posted document's proposal to cohere resurgent democratic socialism is entirely organizational in content and devoid of any politics, any truly left wing thrust. Any political orientation/engagement to this rapid growth of DSA whether conducted externally or from within (or a combination of both) needs to stand firmly on two legs: a decentralized anti-authoritarian or libertarian socialism and the equally anti-statist stance of a sharp anti-imperialism targeting both its " democratic" and authoritarian variants.

Another important lesson to consider when weighing the effectiveness of Uhlmann's political agitation and a range of other developments in political life both domestic and international is that

significant constituencies that desire a defense of democratic rights and tolerance, freedom in short, have taken shape not only attempting to use historically left theories, concepts and vocabulary but outside the Left, conservative and religious concepts and currents as their starting points included. I refer here not to Uhlmann or orienting to or placing faith in types like him but where for example the insurgent sections of youth and others in for example Venezuela and Ukraine to name two are at. Personally at my workplace I find with the young people (about to turn 30) that have just entered the workforce a good number both Black, Asian and white embrace a diverse world, are committed to justice etc. but define themselves as conservatives in some sense. In dialogue and debate a reliance on simplistic left theories assumptions and categories is totally ineffective in building on what I believe are their positives and moving them beyond their mistaken categories or assumptions.

I for one believe we must kill the deep seated Communist or Liberal in our own head to in order to play a role in trying to construct a truly new and revolutionary left.

LOVE TO YOU ALL,  
Mike E

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