

Ringmasters

Well, the Trump circus is back in town, and though Trump's inauguration address was coherently delivered, the show looks more heedless, cruel, reckless, and bizarre than ever. As Trump's mind and body continue to rot, he'll continue to lash out, but from this spot, it looks like Elon Musk and Kash Patel are the ones who are really running things. However strange they may appear on the surface, both of them are far more intelligent than Trump, with Musk the more subtle of the two in his machinations. Maybe we should call them president and vice-president instead of the clowns who officially hold those titles.

The prospects for the climate, the nuclear arms race, human well-being, and civil liberties in our country are ominous. We might as well face up to it and act accordingly.

Back in the 1990s, there was genuine hope for an end to the arms race and for actual nuclear disarmament, but right from the start of the 21st century, things went wrong. In 2002, the second President Bush dropped the ABM treaty. And while Obama was able to get a new START Treaty, the price he had to pay for Senate ratification was the still-going nuclear weapons modernization program, now projected to cost \$2 trillion and keep the arms race going right past the middle of this century. Then came Trump, who trashed every arms control agreement except new START, which is now on life support. The prospects for its renewal in 2026 are bleak at best. Biden did nothing to repair what Trump had wrecked with the result that we now have a pell-mell arms race, a runaway train with no brakes on it.

The likes of Trump, Musk, and Patel couldn't care less. After all, there's money to be made, with every prospect of covering any inconvenient expense by slicing into Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education funding, and veterans' benefits. The cherry on top of this sundae is another tax cut for the already rich and their investments in the armaments industry.

Among the entertainments for his audience, Trump has promised to take back the Panama Canal from Panama, rename Mount Denali for his new favorite predecessor, William McKinley, send troops to Mexico to crush the drug cartels, and rename the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America. As a bonus, he has described his coming term as America's golden age.

While Trump and Vance offer their amusements, Musk and Patel, who have some administrative know-how, will do the actual damage. A spineless Congress and largely rotten judiciary will do nothing about it.

So, what's the peace movement to do? Though it will be on the defensive for the time being, panic is the worst option. But as arms control expert Joe Cirincione has pointed out, the movement needs to take a hard look at its own weaknesses. His analysis is worth our careful examination. He sees a weak, ineffective peace movement, with its many small groups competing among themselves to show which one is most politically correct. Result: no truly effective change in public policy, with the hope of a just and nonviolent world ever more distant. As this writer sees it, the intramural bickering is especially noticeable here in Maine, with people accusing one another of bad faith. As Cirincione sees it, peace groups must-MUST-stop the

bickering and UNITE around a common purpose. Otherwise, nothing of value will follow. The militarists will laugh us off, and win.

Forget about ourselves, and our wishes to be important. Can humanity afford losses such as those?

Above all else, a resolute, determined, and visible witness must continue, and we must grab hold of any chance to act, especially if the erratic nature of this administration unknowingly offers us the opportunity.

While we realize that we may have to be lean about our priorities, here is a list of possibilities for your consideration and hopefully for action:

- Push for a durable, lasting Gaza ceasefire
- Elect pro-peace candidates to Congress whenever possible
- Defend the vulnerable among us from racist attacks, including immigrants at risk of deportation
- Oppose Project 2025 and its pro-war policies
- Expose and oppose Trump's cabinet nominees
- Build a strong, diverse peace movement
- Oppose the current nuclear arms buildup and push for nuclear disarmament

Be not afraid. Keep on keepin' on.

John Raby
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