

The Possible Great Leap Forward
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George Packer, a brilliant staff writer at The Atlantic magazine was one of the essayists in the October issue, devoted to the theme of "Making America Again." The Atlantic has been extremely astute in predicting the outcome of the 2020 Presidential election, better than any of the other speculations I have seen.

He begins: "The country is at a low point---our civic bonds frayed, our politics toxic. But we may be on the cusp of an era of radical reform that advances citizens' rights, restores opportunity, and repairs our broken democracy."

It was heartening to read this column in the midst of Trump's last crazed attempts to reverse the election that he lost and do as much damage to the institutions of government that he could. We watched him huddled in the White House with his small circle of crazies and pardoned felons, considering declaring martial law and seizure of voting machines that they believed were clever enough to switch all votes from Trump to Biden. We have finally seen the back of them all. We have a new administration, peopled with competent patriots who bring experience, decency, and good will to governance.

President Biden had promised that he will return normalcy to government, but Senator Michael Bennet (D Colorado) told Packer: "I think we are at a hinge moment in history, one of those moments that arises every 50 years or so. We have the opportunity to set the stage for decades of progressive work that can improve the lives of tens of millions of Americans." The crisis of our collapse has opened the minds of intelligent leaders to reimagine what kind of country we can be.

Historic Reform Periods. In the 20th century, Progressivism was already in the air, much of it codified by President Theodore Roosevelt, who believed that government was not just for the rich and powerful. Fifty years later, Franklin Delano Roosevelt met the greatest economic crisis ever faced with the New Deal, including unemployment insurance, minimum wages, and collective bargaining rights. It was a start, with much more needed. Lyndon Johnson tried to mend America's founding sin, Black disenfranchisement. It began the process. Later, the "Me Too" movement focused on women's perennial societal disadvantages, still unfinished. Biden will have real opportunities to be the third reform era.

The Pandemic. The horror of this mismanaged deadly pandemic has focused thinkers on what was missing in America's limp response: paid family and medical leave, paid sick days, health care with options of joining Medicare. Perhaps it is now time to detach health insurance from employers to where it belongs, the country's taxpayers. Roosevelt's New Deal did this for the elderly, making social security a right (and responsibility of paying in to it) for everybody. An Industrial Policy. Biden is proposing a massive, targeted investment policy to restructure production for national goals, something no president has done since the 1940s, when we were at war. This is focused on the Green New Deal, meeting the needs of slowing climate change and opening a vast array of new jobs, benefitting all levels of work, from infrastructure labor to the most educated among us.

Reforming Government. The Senate, as envisioned as a wise deliberative body to protect America from hasty populism or a rogue president has failed to meet its obligation. Senate rules and a Machiavellian Senate Leader, Mitch McConnell, has turned it into an employment agency for conservative judges and a pot of earmarked money for some really villainous candidates for office. It is time for the Democrats to eliminate the filibuster (an undemocratic block to majority will) and for a defunct party to die and find rebirth in a new, clean conservative party. The Lincoln Project of former Republicans is already working on this. For all candidates for office, ethics rules with teeth must be passed in legislation.

Election Reforms. Proposals include registering each 18 year old automatically, go to all mail-in-voting as many states have already done, and making election day a national holiday. Reduce elections to eight weeks, and have campaigns paid for by the taxpayers only.

"Yes we can."
686 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know That? Contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.

