

Solving the Alienation
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As I wrote in my last column, Fiona Hill, our former Russia expert who served in the Obama and Trump administrations, has provided a unique examination of comparable popular discontent in the US, England, and Russia. By comparing them, she has focused on a common cause: societal disruption so rapid and severe that large sectors of society are left feeling abandoned. When people are feeling abandoned by their governments, they are vulnerable to populist scoundrels who promise them leadership (and revenge).

In all three countries, major industries became obsolete---primarily coal and big manufacturing. When workers have been supported (even badly supported) by such industries, their closure leaves them without any new jobs to fill the gap. Their resentment is magnified when other sectors: urban, educated, and with new technologies, are flourishing. This causes a big divide among the "elites" and the "common people."

The US, says Hill, has wasted human capital on an enormous scale over the last forty years by constraining social mobility for millions of people. People in the obsolete industries cannot just pick up and move. At least the older members cannot. Many of these regions have been home to their people for generations. When industries die, so do all the amenities in their towns: shops, cinemas, schools, health insurance, and even food markets. Government dole keeps them barely surviving.

The north of England, had poverty after the closure of the mines and industries, enterprises that had made Britain rich in the past, that dwarfs our own countries poor regions. But better than we have done, despite despair, there were some systems and mechanisms that helped restore dignity to the region. The National Health Service (which we still do not have in the US) at least took care of people's health, and provided some jobs to replace those lost. That was a start.

Health care gives security and remedies for pain, dental deterioration, hearing and vision care, surgery, vaccinations, and all the other things that give us reasonable lives. The lack of this in such places as West Virginia is evident in health statistics and the opioid crisis. Much of West Virginia's health care is in the hands of two visiting nurses in an old bus, a charity, serving remote villages with aging populations.

Food security is another thing that plagues the left-out sectors. As towns melt down, markets vanish, leaving only fast foods and their health consequences.

Owning a house, as we found after the GI bill enabled veterans to own homes, is the next essential step. Renting is a dead end, and even the company housing (substandard) was no longer available.

Schooling is the next essential road to recovery. This has become a problem in the hollowed out former industrial communities. As jobs melt down, so does the population, and without population, schools lose their amenities along with the students. Rural schools struggle to provide the courses needed for children to get into universities. This cements the class disparity that we increasingly see. Our country has many deteriorating schools in poorer neighborhoods, very different from the excellent schools for the more educated and more affluent. This further divides the population into elites and have-nots, which makes for further bitterness by the latter, and fear by the former.

Infrastructure is an obvious benefit to everyone. We need good roads for commuting, repaired bridges for safety, Internet networks for everyone (including the underserved), safe water and air, and measures to reduce global climate change. All of these things provide jobs for the able bodied and for those older and sedentary.

Working women have been among the left behind. Child care is essential if women are to work. Elder care is also an underpaid sector. Again, education can produce more competent women in these necessary professions and will benefit all families.

Fiona Hill discusses all these sectors and their importance to rescue and redirect our countries into a better future. They are best provided in a comprehensive way, not piecemeal, as was the Franklin Delano Roosevelt New Deal.

This is exactly the generational program President Biden has presented. We should

shortly see the results.

687 words

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