

Trump

I'm going to say something very unpopular in my world: Trump is right about some big things.

He's right that many Americans are getting screwed by the system. He's right that the economy is not growing nearly fast enough. He's right that we're drowning in political correctness, and that broken campaign finance laws have bred a class of ineffective career politicians. He may even be right that free trade is not the best policy. Trump supporters are not dumb.

But Trump is wrong about the more important part: how to fix these problems. Many of his proposals, such as they are, are so wrong they're difficult to even respond to.

Even more dangerous, though, is the way he's wrong. He is not merely irresponsible. He is irresponsible in the way dictators are.

Trump's casual racism, misogyny, and conspiracy theories are without precedent among major presidential nominees. He has said that a judge of Mexican descent isn't treating him fairly because of his heritage and that we should ban Muslims from entering the country.

When his supporters beat up a homeless Hispanic man and cited Trump, he called them "very passionate". He has accused Obama of somehow being responsible for the recent shooting in Orlando.

To anyone familiar with the history of Germany in the 1930s, it's chilling to watch Trump in action. Though I know intellectually it's easy in hard economic times to rile people up with a hatred of outsiders, it's still surprising to watch this happen right in front of us.

It's hard to tell, as it often is with demagogues, how much is calculation and how much is genuine belief. But it's a real and terrifying possibility that Trump actually believes much of what he says. In any case, when he says it, it signals to other people that it's ok to believe.

Demagogic hate-mongers lead down terrible paths. It would be particularly embarrassing for us to fall for this—we are a nation of immigrants, and we know that immigrants built this country (and Trump, of course, is the grandson of immigrants and married to an immigrant).

Hitler taught us about the Big Lie—the lie so big, and so often repeated, that people end up believing it.

Trump's Big Lie is hiding in plain sight. His Big Lie is that he's going to Make America Great by keeping us safe from outsiders.

But he has no serious plan for how to restore economic growth, which is what we actually need. Without it, we'll be in a zero-sum game and face continued infighting. And without it, we'll lose our position as the most powerful country in the world.

He distracts us with hate of outsiders in the hopes that we don't notice he has no plan for the inside. He has failed to put forward a serious plan for major investments in research and technology that we so desperately need. Instead, he tries to distract us with fear of Them.

At least Trump is willing to talk about the fact that the US is not on an acceptable growth trajectory. The Big Truth in Trump's slogan is "Again"—we do need a fundamental change to get back to where we were. Clinton's dangerously bad Big Lie is that there's no big problem here at all.

Trump is right about the problem, but horribly wrong about the solution.

I take some risk by writing this (even though I've supported some Republicans in the past), and I'll feel bad if I end up hurting Y Combinator by doing so. I understand why other people in the technology industry aren't saying much. In an ordinary election it's reasonable for people in the business world to remain publicly neutral. But this is not an ordinary election.

In the words of Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." This would be a good time for us all—even Republicans, especially Republican politicians who previously endorsed Trump—to start speaking up.

Note: Anyone is welcome to republish this.

Note 2: Apparently the Burke quote was not definitively said by him :(