

Our own times seem so divided, so violent, that we cannot imagine that we experienced such political violence before. Yet we have indeed: just before the Civil War, after the failure of the Reconstruction (lynchings and attacks on Black towns), and in a series of anarchist assassinations of world leaders, starting with President William McKinley in 1901.

In 1908, an anarchist shot a Catholic priest who had just given him communion. In 1910, a dynamite attack on the Los Angeles Times killed 21 people. In 1914, anarchists mistakenly exploded a bomb in a New York City tenement, killing four people. In 1916, an anarchist chef dumped arsenic into the soup at a banquet for businessmen and clergy, but not enough to kill them. Later, a shrapnel-filled suitcase killed 10 people and wounded 40 at a parade. In 1917, a police department headquarters was bombed killing nine officers and two civilians. In 1919, dozens of mail bombs were sent to business leaders and government officials, and one Supreme Court Justice.

Nobody in the US was exempt. These acts happened in Buffalo, Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, and Milwaukee. Starting in 1919, anarchists detonated bombs in eight American cities, including Washington, DC, government officers. During all these years, at least 400 people were killed and 2,000 wounded in more than 14,000 separate attacks. (See Atlantic, April 2023.)

The only comparable chaos we have experienced is the number of high school and college mass shootings we have had in recent years, thanks to the Republican Party's refusal to do what their predecessors had done in 1934, when they outlawed the machine gun. Today's Republicans are in thrall of the National Rifle Association and, apparently, the White Supremist thugs, who favor their M1-15s. Fortunately, when they attacked the Congress on January 6, 2022, they did not bring the munitions they had in readiness in Virginia. They resorted only to clubs, flagpoles, and bear repellent, and were eventually driven out of their occupied building, and to date, 1,000 of them have been arrested, and many tried and in prison.

The data in this article are frightening indeed, and we are seeing attempts by anarchists to replicate the past. They are not as effective as their predecessors, and there are indications that the public is sick of this.

We already know what we have to do to bring this siege mentality to an end: elect enough Democrats to outlaw the weapons of war from our streets. The public, in polls, indicate readiness. We just need results at election time. At the recent State of the Union address, President Biden said: "There's no place for political violence in America, and we must give hate and extremism in any form no safe harbor." Biden's speech was greeted by jeers and name-calling by some of the Republicans in the House.

Both in history and today, addressing an underlying social ill, great inequality between the haves and have nots, has brought anarchistic violence to an end. The violence in the 1930s ended when President Roosevelt addressed the country's Depression and, ultimately, when World War II erupted. The formerly unemployed had jobs.

President Biden recognizes the remedy that, with enough Democrats, he could enact: a real war on poverty, and willingness of Congress to pass bills that lift the neglected from food insecurity and, finally, universal medical care. Countries with secure middle classes do not breed anarchy. We could actually do this, but there has to be a period of reconstruction and much public discussion to support it: something that both Roosevelt presidents had.

President Biden has started this process, and the benefits mailed out to families to address child hunger, even during the emergency of the COVID pandemic, showed us what we could do. The complaint that we don't have enough money to do this is a constant drumbeat of Conservatives. We have enough for great tax breaks for the very rich, but not enough to create a larger middle class.

We need two similar middle-class parties again. That is where progress comes from.

The solution is at the voting polls in 2024.

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