

the myth of the successfulness of Czechoslovak reforms interrupted by the Soviet invasion of 1968 or their role as inspiration for Gorbachev's perestroika. This is not to say that Ellman's conclusions are unconvincing or that the book itself lacks a sufficient research basis. Yet, brief descriptions of the economies of the missing states would definitely help to fill the unnecessary gap.

To conclude, *Socialist Planning* is an extremely readable and enriching book for anybody who is interested in the problem of planning in its widest perspective. Indeed, it is an excellent insight into planned economies under socialism. Clarity of the explanations of even the most complex theoretical frameworks of socialist planning makes it accessible not only for economists, but even for an unexperienced reader. In addition, Ellman's book should be understood as a kind of a warning against "grand" concepts and campaigns. They, as Ellman convincingly proved, may lead to disasters.

Karel Svoboda

Bill Press, **The Obama Hate Machine: The Lies, Distortions, and Personal Attacks on the President – And Who Is Behind Them.** New York: Thomas Dunne Books and St. Martin's Press, 2012. 320 pages. ISBN 978-1250031020

The election of Barack Hussein Obama in the November of 2008 was a watershed moment in American history. Many who watched this enigmatic man ascend to the highest office of the land anticipated a new era, both politically and culturally, looking towards a post-racial America and the return of civility to the culture of poisoned politics in Washington D.C. Despite these well-intentioned and naively idealist expectations, the American people and their newly elected President – the first African-American to achieve that distinction – found themselves in the all-too-familiar milieu of culture wars, political dysfunction and latent racism. His ascendancy to the world's most powerful office should have signaled a sea-change in American political discourse. And in the eyes of author and liberal political commentator, Bill Press, it did, however, not as most of us anticipated. In his most recent effort, *The Obama Hate Machine: The Lies, Distortions, and Personal Attacks on the President – And Who Is Behind Them*, Press maintains that the election of Barack Hussein Obama as the Forty-Fourth President of the United States of America heralded a new and unprecedented moment in American Presidential history where we witnessed relentless assault of "personal attacks and a litany of hate uglier than those directed against any other president in modern times."¹ More importantly, Press argues that this so-called "hate machine" was funded, orchestrated and maintained through the directive of the now infamous Koch Brothers in collusion with Republican Congressional members and

¹ Bill Press. *The Obama Hate Machine: The Lies, Distortions, and Personal Attacks on the President – And Who Is Behind Them* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books and St. Martin's Press, 2012), 2.

their leadership alongside an all-too-willing and compliant media that collectively worked towards the destruction of the man in the Oval Office solely for their personal benefit.

Bill Press was born William H. Press on April 8, 1940, in Wilmington, Delaware, and has established himself a successful American politically liberal talk-radio host, television commentator and author. Starting his careers in Los Angeles, California, Press honed his rhetorical political skills among local national affiliates within the city before moving on to the more visible cable news punditry shows on cable television such as *CNN* and *MSNBC*'s *Crossfire*, *Spine Room* and *Buchanan and Press* shows. Today he regularly appears as a paid political commentator on both stations as well as his own "The Bill Press Show" on *Free Speech TV* and his eponymously named website that has become a popular destination for liberal minded advocacy. Prior to and during his intermittent broadcasting career, Press served as the chief of staff for Republican California State Senator Peter Behr from 1971 to 1973, as Director of the California Office of Planning and Research under Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat, from 1975 to 1979. He also served from 1993 to 1996 as the Chairman of the Democratic Party of California.²

Press, a vocal mouth piece of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, has penned numerous texts attacking the right and Republican officeholders under such overtly partisan titles such as *Bush Must Go! The Top Ten Reasons Why Bush Doesn't Deserve a Second Term* (2004), *How the Republicans Stole Christmas: The Republican Party's Declared Monopoly on Religion and What Democrats Can Do to Take it Back*, its sister title *How the Republicans Stole Christmas: Why the Religious Right is Wrong about Faith & Politics and What We Can Do to Make it Right* (2005), *Trainwreck: The End of the Conservative Revolution (And Not a Moment Too Soon)* (2008) and *Toxic Talk: How the Radical Right Has Poisoned America's Airwaves* in 2010. His most recent endeavor follows the same format of anti-Republican and anti-Conservative lambast and excessively verbose subtitles.³

It goes without saying that two distinctly opposing views of President Barack Hussein Obama emerged during his campaign for President and continue to exist to this day in America. The political and cultural left sees the President as the culmination and successful outcome of the nation's great multicultural experiment and hailed him as the start of a post-racial reality that much of the country yearned for, while the political and cultural right has defined him as something distinctly different and wholly un-American. Author Alan Greenblatt argued in a May 13, 2014 *NPR* article "Race Alone Doesn't Explain Hatred of Obama, But It's Part of the Mix" that it's not just race but that for many on the right it's what Obama represents as a child of mixed parentage with an African Muslim father who was outspokenly anti-colonial in his politics and a white Midwestern Christian mother that embraced the "countercultural left." They gave their son an African first name and a Muslim middle name, raised him in a multicultural global environment that eventually led him to settle in the diverse and primarily democratic landscape of Chicago, giving rise

² Corey Dietz, "A Profile of Radio Personality Bill Press" on *About.com*, <http://radio.about.com/od/radiotalkshowhosts/p/A-Profile-Of-Radio-Personality-Bill-Press.htm>.

³ "Bill Press," *Tribune Media Services*, <http://www.tmsfeatures.com/bio/bill-press/>.

to our first multicultural urban president. In addition to this diversity that is abhorred by certain segments of conservative America, Obama represented the antithesis of the Republican Party, its political platform and the majority view of most of its members – rural, white, Protestants who “held tightly to their guns” and lamented the changing landscape of American culture.⁴

The first chapter of Press’s defensive pro-Obama tome, “Presidents Under Fire,” examines how the tradition of disrespecting and maligning the President has not only remained a constant in American political discourse but dates back to the time of our founding-fathers. It appears that the blood sport of political character assassination is as old as the nation and a cultural relic of Revolutionary politics that justified America’s independence from the British Crown. Much in the same manner as today’s politicians, the founding generation employed character debasement as a means of achieving policy goals opposed by their respective presidents. Washington’s belief in avoiding foreign entanglements was not only part of his farewell address to the nation but part of his presidential policy that was vehemently opposed by Thomas Jefferson who openly supported France in their war against Britain. Jefferson supported a Republican press that not only actively spread rumors about the President Washington that were sexual in nature and described Washington’s farewell as “the loathings of a sick mind.”⁵ Press highlights throughout the chapter the absolute disdain that contemporaries from other parties had for their respective presidents. And it is here where the central premise of Press’s effort rings a bit hollow in that the maligning of Presidents appeared a near constant throughout the antebellum era of American politics – well-known among scholars of Abraham Lincoln who was labeled a “knuckle-dragging, knocked-kneed Gorilla” – throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century to the present. In fact Press himself traces the trend from Washington to Adams to Jefferson, then to Lincoln and beyond.

So is the Obama Hate Machine unique in contemporary politics as the author provides ample examples of similar rhetoric leveled against numerous presidents where we see charges of Washington as a traitor, Adams as a monarchist, Jefferson as a sexual deviant and morally corrupt man while Abraham Lincoln was labeled a gorilla charged with grave executive usurpation? We see how Franklin Delano Roosevelt was tagged as a socialist and communist through the efforts of his primary adversary, the three Dupont Brothers who ran the corporate giant and served as a similar foil alongside their Liberty League to FDR as the Koch Brothers and the Tea Party are to Obama. FDR equally contended with the new media of Talk Radio that emerged alongside his presidency stating that he “consorted with the enemies of civilization, [...] deceived the citizens of the United States, [...] transcended the bounds of his executive position.”⁶ Accusations sounding all too familiar in

⁴ Alan Greenblatt, “Race Alone Doesn’t Explain Hatred of Obama, But It’s Part of the Mix,” *NPR.org*, <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/05/13/311908835/race-alone-doesnt-explain-hatred-of-obama-but-its-part-of-the-mix>.

⁵ Press, *The Obama Hate Machine*, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

today's world. Press also asserts that the Tea Party is merely a creation of Koch Industries much in the same vein as the Liberty League was created and funded by the Duponts.⁷ Press shows how these initial pillars of opposition – press media, politicians, big business and talk radio – were initially combined against FDR and later utilized against proceeding presidents with great effect, in particular in the Republican effort against Clinton that began in an effort to prevent the moderate candidate from gaining the democratic nomination against the incumbent George Herbert Walker Bush. Press states that under the guidance of Lee Atwater, the chairman of the Republic National Committee, the effort against Clinton began in earnest during the Democratic primaries to allow more liberal candidates to gain the nomination and run against Bush. However, after his victory in the primary and subsequent general election, the RNC realized they could not stop his agenda so they looked to smear his character to cripple his progress culminating in Paula Jones sex scandal, White Water, Trooper Gate, Monica Lewinsky and finally impeachment. This resume alone proved that partisan politics and the destruction of candidates and sitting presidents is not novel but deeply embedded into the political DNA of America since its founding.⁸

In the following two chapters, Press explores the process of “Othering” Barack Hussein Obama as first a candidate and then as President. The process of “Othering” became the central tool for rallying the “disappointment, disapproval and disdain” that the right held for Obama. The right has routinely and consistently labeled him as an anti-Christian, an anti-Capitalist, and simply anti-American in his heart and soul. Press points out that the right latched onto the logic that “because he had a Muslim father, he obviously was a Muslim. Because he had gone to school in Indonesia, he must have attended a madrasa and been taught to hate America.”⁹ This logic continued as his work as a community organizer in poor black neighborhoods made him a socialist and a black nationalist and that his attendance at Trinity United Church of God and his acquaintance with Bill Ayers made justified Obama being called either a “black separatist” or “terrorist sympathizer” respectively. More appalling, the right tended to utilize these various and conflicting labels collectively and interchangeably so that Obama was seen as both a Nazi and a Socialist, a Muslim and a Christian Separatist, and most viciously an anti-American supporter of terrorism intent on the destruction of the nation. It is here where the mere absurdity of these accusations should have lost any salience among conservative Americans. But as Press aptly points out, they did not. More disturbingly, the right continued to parrot the now all-too-common talking points that the Koch Brothers, Republican politicians and the conservative press reinforced over and over again.

Although poignant, the third chapter, “The I Hate Obama Book Club,” is arguably the book's weakest as the author simply offers a cursory and biased summary of books published by conservative authors attacking Obama's administration, policies and ideological tendencies. Press's efforts focus on such titles as *The Manchurian President: Barack*

⁷ Ibid., 35–38, 198.

⁸ Ibid., 42–45.

⁹ Ibid., 51–53.

Obama's Ties to Communists, Socialists and Other Anti-American Extremists, the aptly titled, *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular Socialist Machine*, and *Barack Obama's Plan to Socialize America and Destroy Capitalism*, just to name a few of the catchier titles among the growing field of Obama hate literature. Press disturbingly observes that "By year three of his presidency, a staggering 67 books, at least had been published that demonized Barack Obama – far more than either Bill Clinton or George W. Bush ever had to contend with – and the number keeps growing."¹⁰ By the same time in Clinton's presidency, only eleven anti-Clinton books were published while Bush contended with only five anti-Bush tomes during the same period. Press goes on to dedicate a few cursory paragraphs of summary and disdain to more than sixty of the derogatory titles while also addressing the half dozen by more liberal and leftist authors deploring Obama's failure as a liberal democrat and his failure to usher in the leftist revolution that they all foresaw with his election.

It is within the final two chapters that we truly get to the core of Press's thesis and the role of the industrial Koch Brothers and the media machine that, he contends, they directly created. In Chapter 5, simply titled "The Brothers," Press examines the direct role that Charles and David Koch have played in the creation, promotion and continuation of the Obama Hate Machine. His account begins with the infamous secret media of "conservative fat cats" in Palm Springs in January 2011 where the brothers gathered their billionaire industrialist and corporate minions to discuss their collective strategy and pool their boundless resources to stop the anti-corporate/anti-capitalist agenda of the President Obama. The efforts of what Press deftly has coined the "Kochtopus" first came to light on August 30, 2010, in *The New Yorker* investigative report by Jane Mayer titled "Covert Operations: The Billionaire Brothers Who Are Waging a War Against Obama." Press argues that Mayer's article clearly bothered the brothers who subsequently hired investigators to "dig up dirt on Mayer and accuse her of plagiarism."¹¹ Press states that this tactic of confrontation, false claims and intimidation soon became par for the course and was quickly employed across the entire apparatus of the machine – by politicians, the press and by the numerous think tanks and non-profits that were created and employed to promote Koch's pro-corporate/pro-industrial agenda.

After tracing the Koch family tree back to their father Fred who made his fortune developing the oil industry for the Stalinist regime, Press moves on to discuss the contradictory anti-Obama-ism of the Koch's who have seen record profits under the openly pro-business president. Press traces their history of supporting their pro-business, libertarian politics in an era void of the John Birch society that forced the Koch Brothers to "chart their own course [...] as libertarians advocating the principles of smaller government, less regulation, lower taxes and greater reliance on the free market."¹² After a failed bid on the Libertarian Party ticket in 1984 where the brothers invested over two million of their own money, Charles and David turned to the development of foundations and non-profits to

¹⁰ Ibid., 137–38.

¹¹ Ibid., 178.

¹² Ibid., 184.

advance their cause. Through such organizations as the Center for Public Integrity, Citizens for a Sound Economy, FreedomWorks, and countless other organizations, the Koch's funneled tens of millions of dollars into campaign activities from 1984 to the present. Their anti-regulation/anti-environment platform even drew the ire of the Clinton era Justice Department and incurred a thirty-five million dollar fine for corporate malfeasance in their oil industry concerning repeated pollution and an estimated three million gallons of oil into American waterways.¹³ Such episodes only served to steel the Koch Brothers' resolve to use all of their resources to reshape government to best suit their needs and interests. By the time of Obama's election, the Kochtopus was in full swing as they funneled more and more funds into small-government conservative candidates, think-tanks, and according to Press, the Tea Party movement that he states from its inception was an "Astroturf movement, created and fed from the top down by right-wing political activists and major donors with their own extreme, anti-Obama agenda – and led, of course, by two organizations and two brothers. Without them, the Tea Party would not exist."¹⁴

In the final chapter, "The Role of the Media," Press argues that structural, institutional and technological changes within the world of contemporary media compared to the halcyon days of Cronkite-past directly contributed to the creation of the Obama Hate Machine as the profession was no longer tethered to its original mission of objective observation and reporting of the world. He understandably asks the questions of what specifically happened that allowed "journalism to fall off its golden pedestal" and for the profession to transition from "Walter Cronkite to Glenn Beck." Press maintains that fundamental changes in technology and increased competition among traditional formats coupled with the emergence of new avenues, media outlets and the establishment of the twenty-four hour news cycle among the ever-evolving cable networks forced this shift from objectivity to hyper-partisanship and hackery. Another contributing factor to this shift was the intense consolidation of newspapers, magazines and networks in response to the increasingly competitive marketplace for 24/7 news programs and content. Collectively, these trends contribute to the growing problem in part by "dumbing down of America politics" while further dividing the nation by creating the myth among conservative of the all-powerful "Liberal Media" and its desire to contribute to Obama's radical revolution and destruction of the nation. In spite of his assessment of the forces of change and the destructive potential, Press remains a bit of an apologist for Liberals without holding them to the same level of contempt for their contributions to the fall of media in America. Anyone who watches a handful of programs on *CNN* and *MSNBC* can easily see that the majority of programming is geared towards the glorification of non-news and partisan politics.

Overall, Bill Press has written a convincing and engaging account of the collective efforts of the political right, right-wing media and corporate America – led by the Koch Brothers – to wage a relentless and callous war not only against the agenda of President

¹³ Ibid., 188.

¹⁴ Ibid., 198.

Obama, but more interestingly and disturbingly against his character and humanity. Despite this falling in line with the age-old American tradition of vilifying and demonizing the office of the President of the United States since the time of the Founding Fathers and its first occupant, no single American President has faced such an incessant and unrelenting effort of destroying both the man and the office he holds. The fact that Press directly witnessed and actively opposed this struggle gives us insight into his passion to destroy the “Hate Machine.” However, the truth of the matter is irrelevant to those engaged in this effort and all too obvious to the rest of us who have seen through their collective bigotry. Although Press successfully highlights the role of the Koch Brothers corporate anti-regulatory ideology and their manipulation of Congress in navigating the “Hate Machine,” he fails to identify and condemn the primacy of race as the catalyst for the broad grassroots support that directly fuels the machine and makes it so effective. Despite this fact and the relentless campaign waged by the “Hate Machine”, Barack Hussein Obama has been successfully elected twice and the success of his efforts will be determined by future generations, not those who tried tirelessly to stop him.

Dejan Kralj