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The Voice of Edmund Burke speaks across time

By Llewellyn King
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Impeachment is a procedure of last resort. It is for when those governed are unable to abide the excesses of one person or more doing the governing. It owes its genesis to England and was a remedy for the Parliament to remove, or have removed, agents of the Crown (the king) whose conduct was egregious and contrary to the public good.

It goes back to the 14th century. The language is the language of the day, peculiarly vague in today's proceedings. "High crimes and misdemeanors" was one of those phrases that everyone in the context of the day knew what it meant. "Conduct unbecoming an

officer and gentleman" is another such phrase loaded with meaning but deliberate in its obscurity.

It was not until 1788 that Edmund Burke, the great Anglo-Irish orator, moralist and member of Parliament, really put flesh on the skeleton of impeachment. During the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of Bengal and employee of the marauding British East India Company — which had been acting as a government in India before it was annexed by Britain. He was the agent of what was little more than a criminal enterprise.

Hastings claimed that he was given arbitrary power by the East India Company to act in any way he chose. It was this arbitrary power, this concept that he was above the law and above all norms of decency, that inflamed Burke. "We have no arbitrary power to give, because arbitrary power is a thing which neither any man can hold, nor any man can give. No man can lawfully govern himself according to his own will — much less can one person be governed by the will of another," he said.

Burke stated that there was no entitlement to arbitrary power in any human institution, and it could not be conferred on a governor by anyone because there was no entitlement under heaven for arbitrary power.

It can be argued in today's crisis it is the exercise of arbitrary power by President

Trump that lies behind the U.S. House's move to impeach. Arbitrary power in diverting funds not approved for that purpose to building a wall on the southern border. Arbitrary power in restricting Congress's entitlement to investigate the executive branch. On and on the use of what many would call arbitrary power, from abrogating treaties, abandoning allies, trashing traditions, and reversing previous settled issues, like the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

All this, Trump asserts, is constitutional under Article 11. In essence, he has said, "Arbitrary power is mine."

That is what lies behind the urge to impeach Trump. He is claiming to be, in conduct and statement, above the Constitution and the law. Ergo, he should be impeached.

But no. Impeachment, as Burke and his allies found, is a trap unless followed by conviction. In Hastings' case, impeachment was up to the House of Lords and, despite the pleading of Burke and others, it declined to impeach after the procedure had dragged on for seven years.

Given the pusillanimous nature of the Republican-controlled U.S. Senate, its seeming preparedness to overlook damage to the constitutional order of governance and all the cascading damage to come down through the years, Trump's acquittal is to be feared.

Trump in a second term, with the sense that he had been vindicated, would have no regard for law. He would feel emboldened to exercise arbitrary power in the most egregious way, rewarding his business interests and punishing his enemies, real and imagined.

As others have suggested, a better path for Democrats to pursue in the present constitutional crisis might have been to censure Trump, while looking to the courts to restrict him where possible. A less dramatic indictment, but also less of a future danger.

Republicans have developed an interesting defense of their own. Call it "the eye-rolling, tut-tutting." They do this whenever Trump is raised in conversation, but they will not curb him in the Senate or speak out in public. Political cowardice.

These lily-livered legislators might find courage if they read on in Burke's pleading in the matter of Hastings: "Those who give and those who receive arbitrary power are alike criminal; and there is no man but is bound to resist it in the best of his power, wherever it shall show its face to the world."

There is much more from Burke. It is meaty, relevant stuff.

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Abandoning Syria's Kurds Tarnishes Our Country's Honor

By John Caves
InsideSources.com

In Kobani, Syrian Kurds fought to the death against ISIS for five months. On the third week of battle, the United States came to their aid with air strikes. On January 26, 2015, the ISIS jihadists retreated.

The Siege of Kobani became known as the "Stalingrad of Islamic State." It was the

territorial high-water mark of the so-called caliphate, which shrunk thereafter under attack from the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on the ground and the U.S.-led coalition from the air. Eleven thousand SDF soldiers died in that campaign, as did 10 Americans.

Now Kobani will be besieged again, if it has not been already by the time of this written, this time by Turkey. Though it will probably resist again, this time it will probably fall. Once it falls, it will be occupied. Once it is occupied, it will be repopulated — but not by Kurds.

The Turkish government has made clear its plan to settle Arab refugees throughout the Kurdish-majority corridor along Syria's northeastern border. Turkey has incredulously declared that area a "safe zone" for those refugees. It is unclear how "safe" the zone will be for those Kurds who remain after the Turkish army has smashed their resistance with tanks, air strikes and artillery.

If this Turkish offensive becomes a thinly veiled exercise in ethnic cleansing, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan will bear the ultimate moral responsibility for it. But history will remember President Donald Trump's order withdrawing American forces from the area, at Erdogan's urging, as the decision that allowed it to proceed.

Erdogan justifies his action by claiming that the Kurdish YPG militia, which forms the core of the SDF, is linked to the PKK, a Kurdish separatist group that has fought the Turkish state for decades and has at times resorted to terrorism. He is not entirely wrong. Scrutiny of YPG leaders reveals extensive personal connections to the PKK. Nor is the YPG's rule in northeastern Syria saintly, though it is arguably preferable to the alternatives on offer in the region.

But purging Syria's Kurdish population is no way to ensure Turkey's security. It is merely a way for Erdogan to recover his

prestige after the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad and Russia assaulted Syria's western Idlib province this summer, over his feeble objections.

Unfortunately, Erdogan has put his pride before the safety and survival of millions, including his own countrymen. In 2015, after failing to win a majority in parliament necessary to pass a constitutional amendment giving greater powers to the presidency (the office he now holds), he reignited Turkey's insurgency by cutting off peace negotiations with the PKK. The resulting violence generated enough nationalist sentiment for Erdogan's party to win a re-run of the election.

The United States has failed to prevent tragedies before. That is a sad and sometimes unavoidable part of being a great power. But this is no Rwanda, where we were faced with the difficult question of taking on a new, open-ended commitment to stop a country from tearing itself apart.

This time, we were already there. No new commitments were required, and we could have upheld our existing ones to both Turkey and the SDF by simply staying put. Our influence had kept the SDF from attacking Turkey, and would have continued to. Our presence, however small, had deterred Turkey from attacking the SDF, and would have continued to deter it, no matter the big talk from Erdogan. He knew that the United States is stronger than Turkey, and that we would not allow our friends to be slaughtered. Until now.

Whereas with Rwanda we were accused of neglect, with the Kurds we shall be accused of betrayal. We had fought side by side with them. They had borne the battle against ISIS, and relied on us to shield them from the other wolves that stalk the region: Assad, Russia, Iran and Erdogan.

This decision to withdraw is a dark stain on our country's reputation. And its effect might

not be limited to the immediate consequences. Should Erdogan succeed in rearranging northeastern Syria's demography, he will have set the stage for another tragedy. Once a thin ribbon of transplanted Arabs separates two large Kurdish populations, what will happen if Turkey someday loses its grip, and an embittered YPG gains the upper hand? Then vengeful Kurds would be the villains, and innocent Arabs, whom Erdogan used as his pawns, the victims. But the United States would still bear a damning portion of the responsibility.

Our honor demanded better.

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The situation of temporary workers at General Motors

By Steve Horton

Note: The strike by the United Auto Workers against General Motors is now a month old. While there are a number of differences, this one regarding temporary workers has been a major one according to press reports.

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There was a time, long ago, when I—like many other backyard mechanics—could accomplish minor repairs to my car. Which was good since the vehicles I owned back then were often in need of repair. Nowadays, with all of the computerized systems and electronics in the cars and trucks, I wouldn't presume to do much more than change the battery or maybe replace the sparkplugs and wires.

Whether a contract between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors—

or the other two Detroit automakers—would have been simple enough for me (as a layman) to completely comprehend in those bygone days is questionable, but, like fixing a modern car, I have little expertise in judging the intricacies of the contract that's now being negotiated by the union and GM and the cause of the strike that's shut down plants across the United States, idled over 49,000 workers, resulted in lay-offs and accompanying financial challenges for the company's various suppliers, and has created the acrimony.

It's easy enough to take sides—and my reflex is to sympathize with the workers in their desire for decent wages, adequate health care, and a measure of job security, along with an end to the tiered wage scale that results in newer workers receiving a smaller hourly wage than those with seniority.

Yet, I know the importance of a financially-viable General Motors to this state and the rest of the nation, understand the competition the company faces from foreign-based automakers who do not operate with a unionized work force and have lower operational costs, and realize the need to have adequate cash reserves for developing the vehicles of the future that will likely be electric with driverless capacity.

What did catch my attention was one of the points of contention, namely the plight of temporary workers. According to what I've read, they make about \$15 an hour, can be on the job for several years with no path to fulltime employment, and receive fewer of the amenities—the most striking one being that they are not covered by the same health insurance.

Apparently, anywhere from seven-to-ten percent of those working at GM's American facilities are classified as temporary. The UAW would like a defined means by which these workers can transition into permanent status, whereas the company wants to keep

the flexibility of being able to hire or dismiss these workers as needed.

In fact, from what I understand, the company would like to expand this option, viewing it as an effective way of controlling labor costs.

A letter-to-the-editor published in a recent edition of the *Detroit Free Press* by a former temporary worker put the situation in human terms.

He told of being hired as a GM customer care service advisor and assigned to work at GM Tech Center for a contract company.

“I really liked working there, but I became disillusioned after four years and eight months because I was never hired to be a permanent GM employee,” he wrote. “I had brought my Oakland University B.A. degree to the job and put everything on the line with the hope of being hired permanent.”

He went on to say that he regretted his decision to leave, noting that ever since leaving his position in Feb. 2018 “it has been a struggle.” He added that “I miss working at GM” and “it was a very good place work.”

You can say that he and others who accept these ‘temporary’ jobs knew what they were getting into. But it’s human nature (and a commendable character trait) to hope your hard work and dedication will be recognized and rewarded.

A job with one of the automakers, while often physically taxing, has always been considered a plum position—with good pay and great benefits.

Anyone paying attention to the overall situation is well aware that there has been erosion of available jobs—both in the auto industry and other manufacturing sectors—and that wages and benefits are (when inflation is factored in) not what they once were.

The sudden closing of plants, the impact of automation, and companies taking work to other countries have also changed the

landscape. A trend that further erodes the compensation workers receive for their labor—by hiring more temporary workers and fewer permanent ones—and causes even more job insecurity is a troubling one.

It may be great for a company’s bottom line, but it’s not the foundation upon which workers can build their lives and from which a society can continue to thrive and prosper.