

Substantial Disruption



Isms of the Czar

By Mike Tully

One of my strangest radio interviews featured a gadfly named Joe Sweeney, who died a few years ago. Sweeney [repeatedly ran for office](#), losing nearly every election. He seemed a harmless eccentric until he declared he was a “racist” when he ran for congress in 2004. He ran as a Republican and the desperate Republican party ran a conventional candidate against him in the primary. Sweeney trounced him and the GOP was apoplectic. Not the media. Sweeney was a legitimate candidate and a Sweeney interview was a reporter’s dream. I interviewed Sweeney when I was editor of the law school newspaper and looked forward to the return engagement.

I interviewed him again in 2004 during the “Inside Track” radio show with the late [Emil Franzi](#), the show’s founder. I asked Sweeney about his racism and he quoted Martin Luther King, Jr. (“they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character”). I expressed surprise that an avowed racist quoted MLK and told him, “Joe, I’ll take your word for it that you’re a racist. But I have to tell you, you’re not very good at it.”

I remember Sweeney as the media arcade pinballs the term “racism” from one speaker to another, all wondering if the American Czar is a racist and, more importantly, whether racism influences his policies. When a self-designated racist is unsure of the definition, it reminds us to use the term cautiously.

The Czar invites speculation about racist ideology, or at least racist tendencies, based on his words and deeds. The [well-known litany](#) includes: sued by the Nixon Administration for racially-motivated housing discrimination, spreading racist propaganda on his Twitter account, failing to denounce Klansman David Duke, praising white supremacist marchers in Charlottesville and, recently, describing Haiti and African nations as “poop crater” countries. (I cleaned it up in case you read this aloud to children.) The Czar underscored the racism of the latter by adding, “We should have more people from places like Norway,” according to senators from each party who overheard the comments, and one who heard about them from witnesses. Haiti and Africa bad, Scandinavia good? Try taking skin color out of that equation.

Racism might be too narrow a reading of the Czar’s motivation. Sweeney, ironically, provides guidance here as well. When I pressed him on his contradictions, Sweeney explained he was an “economic racist.” He conflated a hardline immigration policy with racism, based on his allegedly having lost a job milking cows to undocumented immigrants. Jim Nintzel of the *Tucson Weekly* also [distilled Sweeney’s alleged racism](#) into a racially-seared immigration policy. “I hate Mexicans who come up here illegally,” Sweeney told him. “All this silly nonsensical crap about how they’re entitled to come up here and get into our wage system and everything else. They haven’t struggled for a damn thing in Mexico. They won’t struggle, because they treat one another like a damn bunch of wild monkeys!” He would be a cult hero in today’s Republican party.

Sweeney's derogatory comments about Mexicans forecast [the Czar's](#) ("*They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists.*") Racism influenced immigration policy in 1924 when congress passed an explicitly racist immigration law favoring western Europeans. As I explained in an [earlier column](#), *Breitbart News* supports an immigration policy similar to the 1924 law. So does the [Attorney General](#). When the Czar calls for "[a system based on merit](#)," there are echoes of 1924.

The Czar not only sees poop craters in foreign nations, he sees them within the United States. Referring explicitly to African-American neighborhoods, [he told a white crowd in North Carolina](#): "You take a look at the inner cities, you get no education, you get no jobs, you get shot walking down the street. ... I mean, honestly, places like Afghanistan are safer than some of our inner cities." The message: dark-skinned people equals poop crater – even in America.

The declarations haven't dissuaded the Czar's core supporters, one of whom [told *The Guardian*](#) why she supports him: "(H)e's anti-left, he's anti-PC, he's anti-stupid." Another, commenting on the Charlottesville remarks, stated, "The KKK had the legal right to express their opposition and they got a permit and everything would have been fine except that counter-protesters came with baseball bats and rocks." He added, "the media does not want that narrative to be told." All wanted stricter immigration, all but one called for a border wall, and every one disregarded reports of the Czar's racist behavior as fabricated or inconsequential.

"The new right understands perfectly well that its mass base is white, and that its political success depends on its ability to interpret white identity in positive political terms," [wrote Howard Winant](#) in *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance*. "Precisely because of its willingness to exploit racial fears and employ racially manipulative practices, the new right has been effective in achieving much of its agenda..."

The Czar follows this playbook and core supporters feast on his words like pigeons at a bus stop. They are dupes. The Czar's ethos is not racism – it's [elitism](#). He lives in an "us versus them" reality, but it's not a "white us" versus "people of color them" reality. It's a "filthy rich us" versus everybody else reality, including his supporters. They're not the people he invites into the penthouse – they're the ones he looks down on from it. They don't know he relegates them to the same poop crater as those they despise.

He only pretends to be Joe Sweeney.