

Die Weltwoche

Interviews Tucker Carlson

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By Urs Gehriger

ZURICH, Switzerland—Weekday nights Fox News Channel star Tucker Carlson can be found merrily berating hapless guests, grilling liberal pundits and defending America’s working and middle classes. Puckish and pugilistic, the 49-year-old insists the Washington elites among whom he grew up despise America’s “normal people.” An ardent fan of Carlson who regularly tunes in to watch the hit cable gab fest is President Donald J. Trump. But as I learn in my interview with Carlson for the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche*, the feelings are not entirely mutual.

“Excuse me,” Tucker Carlson apologizes as his assistant, Emily, ushers me into his airy Fox News office in the Washington, D.C., bureau. The phone on his desk is ringing.

“This probably should be quick,” Carlson promises as he picks up.

Every minute is tightly planned in Tucker Carlson’s studio. He is the break-out cable news star of the year in US media. 2.7 million Americans turn on Fox News every night to watch the preppy tribune of the forgotten man. Carlson’s new book, “Ship of Fools,” has vaulted to number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list unseating Bob Woodward’s “Fear” after four weeks in the top spot.

Carlson’s past month off air has been turbulent. Anti-fascist goons besieged his Washington, D.C., home. His wife Susie was alone inside when the mob pounded on the front door and shouted, “Tucker, we know where you sleep at night!” Terrified, Susie barricaded herself in the pantry and called the police for help.

Carlson has a Swiss great-grandfather, Cesare Lombardi. One of Carlson’s children went to school in Switzerland. As a teenager, Tucker, himself, had a brief stint at a Swiss elite college at Lac Lemman. “I got kicked out,” he sheepishly confesses but refuses to reveal why.

His tone is calmer now. He takes a seat at his desk. Behind him is a panoramic view of the Capitol. Phone still to his ear, he instructs his caller, “We win if we are honest and positive. We lose when we are defensive and anxious.

“I’m sitting now for an interview with a Swiss journalist.”

[While still on the telephone, Mr. Carlson turns his attention toward Mr. Gehriger.]

Tucker Carlson: Would you say you are the paper of record for Switzerland?

Urs Gehriger: Yes.

[Mr. Carlson completed his telephone conversation.]

TC: I'm sorry. I had a contentious interview, but whatever. How is it going in Switzerland?"

UG: Fantastic.

TC: One of the reasons I love Switzerland is the cheese, which I think is better. I like the Alpine environment, the climate, the people, the food, skiing. I love to fly fish. You have trout. You're mountain people. Love them. You know why? Because they're suspicious, that's what I like about them. I would live there.

UG: The Swiss are very suspicious of anybody who is boastful. That's why I have a question about Trump.

TC: I hate that about him. I hate that. It's not my culture. I didn't grow up like that.

UG: In your book you speak a lot about people who attack Trump, but you actually don't say very much about Trump's record.

TC: That's true.

UG: Do you think he has kept his promises? Has he achieved his goals?

TC: No. His chief promises were that he would build the wall, de-fund Planned Parenthood, and repeal Obamacare, and he hasn't done any of those things. There are a lot of reasons for that, but, since I finished writing the book, I've come to believe that Trump's role is not as a conventional president who promises to get certain things achieved to the Congress and then does. I don't think he's capable. I don't think he's capable of sustained focus. I don't think he understands the system. I don't think the Congress is on his side. I don't think his own agencies support him. He's not going to do that.

I think Trump's role is to begin the conversation about what actually matters. We were not having any conversation about immigration before Trump arrived in Washington. People were bothered about it in different places in the country. It's a huge country, but that was not a staple of political debate at all. Trump asked basic questions like "Why don't our borders work?" "Why should we sign a trade agreement and let the other side cheat?" Or my favorite of all, "What's the point of NATO?" The point of NATO was to keep the Soviets from invading western Europe but they haven't existed in 27 years, so what is the point? These are obvious questions that no one could answer.

UG: Apart from asking these very important questions has he really achieved nothing?

TC: Not much. Not much. Much less than he should have. I've come to believe he's not capable of it.

UG: Why should he be not capable?

TC: Because the legislative process in this country by design is highly complex, and it's designed to be complex as a way of diffusing power, of course, because the people who framed our Constitution, founded our country, were worried about concentrations of power. They balanced it among the three branches as you know and they made it very hard to make legislation. In order to do it you really have to understand how it works and you have to be very focused on getting it done, and he knows very little about the legislative process, hasn't learned anything, and hasn't surrounded himself with people that can get it done, hasn't done all the things you need to do so. It's mostly his fault that he hasn't achieved those things. I'm not in charge of Trump.

UG: The title of your book is "Ship of Fools." You write that an irresponsible elite has taken over America. Who is the biggest fool?

TC: I mean let me just be clear. I'm not against an aristocratic system. I'm not against a ruling class. I think that hierarchies are natural, people create them in every society. I just think the system that we have now, the meritocracy, which is based really on our education system, on a small number of colleges has produced a ruling class that doesn't have the self-awareness that you need to be wise. I'm not arguing for populism, actually. I'm arguing against populism. Populism is what you get when your leaders fail. In a democracy, the population says this is terrible and they elect someone like Trump.

UG: When did you first notice that this elite is getting out of touch with the people?

TC: Well, just to be clear, I'm not writing this from the perspective of an outsider. I mean I've lived in this world my whole life.

UG: Which world exactly?

TC: The world of affluence and the high level of education and among—I grew up in a town called La Jolla, California, in the south. It was a very affluent town and then I moved as a kid to Georgetown here in Washington. I've been here my whole life. I've always lived around people who are wielding authority, around the ruling class, and it was only after the financial crisis of '08 that I noticed that something was really out of whack, because Washington didn't really feel the crisis.

If you leave Washington and drive to say Pittsburgh, which is a manufacturing town about three and a half hours to the west, you drive through a series of little towns that are devastated. There are no car dealerships, there are no restaurants. There's nothing. They have not recovered. I remember driving out there one day, maybe eight or nine years ago, and thinking, boy, this is a disaster. Rural America, America outside three or four cities is really falling apart. I thought if you're running the country, you should have a sense of that. I remember thinking to myself, nobody I know has any idea that this is

happening an hour away. That's kind of strange since we're the capital city in charge of making policy for everybody else . . . Massive inequality does not work in a democracy . . . You become Venezuela.

UG: You write about vanishing middle class. When you were born over 60% of Americans ranked middle class. Why and when did it disappear?

TC: If you make above a certain income, or if you live in my neighborhood, you have zero physical contact with other Americans. In other words, the elite in our country is physically separated in a way that's very unhealthy for a democracy, very unhealthy.

UG: The Democratic Party is out of touch with the working class.

TC: Well, that's the remarkable thing. For 100 years the Democratic Party represented wage earners, working people, normal people, middle class people, then somewhere around— I precisely peg it to Clinton's second term in the tech boom in the Bay Area in Francisco and Silicon Valley, the Democratic Party reoriented and became the party of technology, of large corporations, and of the rich. You've really seen that change in the last 20 years where in the top 10 richest zip codes in the United States, nine of them in the last election just went for Democrats. Out of the top 50, 42 went for Democrats. The Democratic Party, which for 100 years was the party of average people, is now the party of the rich.

Donald Trump, who is often seen as this world-changing figure, is actually a symptom of something that precedes him that I sometimes wonder if he even understands which is this realignment. He served the purpose of bringing the middle class into the Republican Party, which had zero interest, no interest in representing them at all. Trump intuitively, he felt, he could smell that there was this large group of voters who had no one representing them and he brought them to the Republican side, but the realignment is still ongoing.

In other words, the Democratic Party used to represent the middle class, it no longer does, it now hates the middle class. The Republican Party which has never represented the middle class doesn't want to. That is the source of really all the confusion and the tension that you're seeing now. I do think, going forward, the Republican Party will wake up and realize these are our voters and we're going to represent them whether we want it or not.

UG: They have to, or they will lose.

TC: They have to, or they will die. Yes.

UG: You're writing in an almost nostalgic tone about the old liberals? People like Miss Raymond, your first-class teacher. You describe her wonderfully in the book. You say that they have vanished. What happened?

TC: I find myself in deep sympathy with a lot of the aims of 1970s liberals. I believe in free speech, and I instinctively side with the individual against the group. I think that the individual matters, I am deeply suspicious of foreign adventurism, voluntary wars, wars of self-defense are not controversial, I'm

for them completely, there's an invasion repellent. The idea that you would send 100,000 troops to a country to improve its political system is grotesque to me. It would've been grotesque to them.

The Vietnam War was horrifying to them because it was a voluntary war, waged for theoretical reasons, geostrategic reasons which they rejected, and I do too. They were also suspicious of market capitalism. They thought that somebody needed to push back against the forces of the market, not necessarily because capitalism was bad, capitalism is not bad, it's also not a religion. We don't have to follow it blindly. We can make autonomous choices about how we respond to market forces. People get crushed beneath its wheels.

Capitalism drives change, innovation change, the old ways give way to new ways of doing things, and in the process of change the weak get hurt always, this was true in industrialization 100 years ago and it's true in the digital revolution now. What's changed is that nobody is standing up on behalf of the people who are being crushed by the change.

UG: Is that really so? Look at the grassroot movement on the left: Alexandra Ocasio Cortez and her socialist group. It is probably 100 years ago when Americans last saw a socialist movement of substance emerging.

TC: Yes. You're absolutely right. That's the future.

UG: In your book, you say they're vanishing but they seem to come back again.

TC: Well, you're absolutely right. You're incisively correct to say that the last time we saw this was 100 years ago, which was another pivot point in our economic and social history. Where, after 10,000 years of living in an Agrarian society, people moved to the cities to work in factories and that upended the social order completely. With that came huge political change and a massive reaction.

In the United States and in Western Europe labor unions moderated the forces of change and allowed us to preserve capitalism in the form that we see it now . . . You're seeing the exact same dynamic play out today, we have another, as I said, economic revolution, the digital age, which is changing how people work, how they make money, how families are structured. There is a huge reaction to that, of course, because there always is, because normal people can't handle change at this pace. People are once again crying out for some help. They feel threatened by the change. What bothers me is that there is no large group of sensible people asking how can we buffer this change. How can we restrain it just enough, not to stop it, but to keep people from overreacting and becoming radical?

UG: Talking about radical. Recently, a radical left-wing group have threatened to storm your Washington home. How is your wife? How is your family?

TC: They are fine, they're pretty tough. They're rattled.

UG: The Antifa-mob came right to the door of your home?

TC: Yes, they did and threatened my wife.

UG: Which must have been absolutely scary?

TC: Yes, it was. My wife was born in the city, my four children were born here, we're not moving.

UG: Your attackers have a goal, they're trying to silence you.

TC: Of course. I would never, of course, that's a cornerstone of Western civilization is expression and freedom of conscience. You can tell me how to behave, you can force me not to sleep or take my clothes off in public, that's fine. Every society has the right to control behavior. But no one has the right to control what you believe. You can't control my conscience, that's mine alone. Only totalitarian movements do that, and that's what they're attempting. Of course, I would die first. I'm never going to submit to that.

UG: Have you ever seen this amount of discontent and aggression here in your lifetime?

TC: No, I've never seen anything like this. What's so striking is that [chuckles] this is really . . . The radicalism is not on behalf of people who are actually suffering, fellow Americans who are suffering, on behalf of the 70,000 people who died of drug ODs last year, or on behalf of the people displaced by automation in GM, or whatever, on behalf of those of the dying American low class. It's really on behalf of theoretical goals.

They're saying that I [Tucker Carlson] am saying naughty things that shouldn't be allowed to be expressed in public. Basically, it's a totalitarian movement. Totally unhelpful. I would say childish. What they're really doing is defending the current order. They're the shock troops of the elites actually. Actually, what you're seeing is something amazing, you're seeing for the first time in history a revolution being waged against the working class. When does that happen?

UG: Your way of debating is very tough. You're sitting there, hammering your guests. Sometimes we have a bit of a problem to understand that. For us it's a bit disturbing.

TC: Of course, it is. It's disturbing for me too!

UG: How tough do you need to be nowadays to have an audience?

TC: Less, I think than sometimes we put into it or I put into it. I'm actually, in my normal life, I think a pretty gentle person. I've never had a yelling fight with my wife in 34 years. I mean, I've never yelled at my children. No, I don't ever.

UG: Never?

TC: Not one time. No, it's not how I communicate. I never want to be impolite. I have been impolite. I've lost my temper a couple times, but I don't want to. I don't like that. I believe in civility.

UG: How do you prepare for those shows? How do you prepare to be so tough?

TC: Well, I just know what I think and I actually read a lot about whatever the topic is. I write the scripts,

UG: You do it all yourself?

TC: We have a writer, but for the opening the long script I write that myself. That's like a thousand words. By the time you've finished writing a thousand words, your mind is limbered up and you know what you think because writing helps you think things through. Then I walk the length of the bureau, and I discard all the complex questions, and I keep only the dumbest questions because the dumbest questions are the most evocative. They tell you the most, I think. Don't you find that interviewing people if you have a super complex question?

UG: Absolutely. Is it true that your microphone is turned up higher than the one of your guests.

TC: No. Somebody said that, really?

UG: Somebody wrote that. I think in the *GQ* magazine.

TC: I've never read an article about myself ever. Because then it makes you self-conscious.

UG: You never do?

TC: Never. I try and stay off the Internet and I try to not be angry. Being angry destroys you. These people came to my house and all these lawyers called me, well, you could sue them and you have them prosecuted. No. I don't want to.

UG: I read in one of those articles that you wanted to join the CIA.

TC: They said no.

UG: Were you upset?

TC: I was very upset. I mean, I would have been terrible. I can't keep a secret. I hate taking orders.

UG: I read that the President is watching your show regularly?

TC: Yes.

UG: Have you heard from him? Has he ever commented on your show?

TC: Yes. Occasionally he'll call . . . Not regularly, but I've heard from him before and I am emphatically not a policy adviser to him or anyone. My job is just to say what I think is true.

UG: You are very different from your colleague, Sean Hannity, who even joined the President on the campaign stage.

TC: No, no. I've never been that with any politician. Nothing personal but that's just not my role. If I wanted to be a policy adviser I probably could. The bar seems to be very low. Most policy advisers are very stupid. I think I could get that job if I wanted, but I don't want that. I'm just a talk show host and I want to say what I think is true. I want to have a conversation about it and then I want to go home.

UG: Your show "Tucker Carlson Tonight" first replaced Megan Kelly when she left Fox in January 2017. Then you moved to prime time 8 p.m. when Bill O'Reilly had to leave Fox after multiple sexual harassment allegations against him became public.

TC: Yes.

UG: Now both former megastars Kelly and O'Reilly are out. Whereas you've just been rising up and up and up. In October 2018, "Tucker Carlson Tonight" was the second-highest rated news show in prime time, after Hannity, with 3.2 million nightly viewers. What is your key of success?

TC: The key is to not go crazy.

[The interview temporarily turns to chit-chat before the next question.]

UG: How close to a revolution is your country?

TC: By revolution, let me be clear, I don't think that we're anywhere near an outbreak of civil war, armed violence between two sides for a bunch of different reasons . . . Testosterone levels are so low and marijuana use is so high that I think the population is probably too . . . What you don't have, prerequisite full revolution, violent revolution, is a large group of young people who are comfortable with violence and we don't have that. Maybe that will change. I hope it doesn't. I don't want violence for violence. I [abhor] violence, but I just don't see that happening. What I see happening most likely is a kind of gradual separation of the states.

If you look at the polling on the subject, classically, traditionally, Americans had antique racial attitudes. If you say, "Would you be okay with your daughter marrying outside her race?" Most Americans, if they're being honest, would say, "No, I'm not okay with that. I'm not for that." Now the polling shows people are much more comfortable with a child marrying someone of a different race than they are marrying someone of a different political persuasion.

"I'd rather my daughter married someone who's Hispanic than liberal," someone might say. That is one measure. There are many measures, but that's one measure of how politically divided we are and I just think that over time, people will self-segregate. It's a continental country. It's a very large piece of land and you could see where certain states just become very, very different. Like if you're conservative, are you really going to live in California in 10 years? Probably not.

UG: Orange County is now purely Democrat.

TC: That's exactly right. You're going to move and if you're very liberal, are you really going to want to live in Idaho? Probably not.

UG: The country is getting redder and bluer.

TC: Exactly.

UG: This revolution you are warning about—what needs to be done to stop it from happening?

TC: Just the only thing you can do in a democracy which is address the legitimate concerns of the population and think more critically and be more wise in your decision making. Get a handle on technology. Technology is the driver of the change, so sweep aside the politics. The fundamental fact about people is they can't metabolize change at this pace because as an evolutionary matter, they're not designed to, they're not. If you asked your average old person what's the most upsetting thing about being old? You expect them to say, "Well, my friends are dead." But that's not what they say. Or "I have to go to the bathroom six times a night." That's not what they say. You know what they say? "Things are too different. This is not the country I grew up in. I don't recognize this." All people hate that. It doesn't mean you're a bigot, it means you're human. Unless you want things to fall apart, become so volatile that you can't have a working economy, you need to get a handle on the pace of change. You have to slow it down.

UG: How important is migration in terms of change?

TC: It's central because nothing changes the society more quickly or more permanently than bringing in a whole new population and that's not an attack on anybody. There are lots of populations—there are lots of immigrants who are much more impressive than I am. I have no doubt about that. I'm not attacking immigrants. I'm merely saying that the effect on the people who already live here is real and they're not bigots for feeling that way.

You come from an ancient country with a series of ancient cultures within it and if you woke up one morning and everyone was speaking Amharic and you didn't recognize any of your surroundings, that would be deeply upsetting to you.

UG: What you are saying, it's necessary to slow it down, control it?

TC: You have to slow it down. Look at the Chinese. I abhor, I despise the Chinese government. However, I'm willing to acknowledge wise behavior when I see it. The Chinese would never accept this pace of demographic change not simply because they're racist, though of course, they are, but that's not the point. The point is because they don't want their society to fall apart because they're in charge of it.

The childlike faith that we have in America, and America is the worst at this, that all change is good and that progress is inevitable and if something is new and fresh and more expensive, it's got to be better.

It is kind of refreshing for Europeans that even Hillary Clinton tells Europeans, "You have got to stop this. You've got to get control of migration or you disintegrate."

John Kerry said the same thing, amazingly. They're telling the truth.

UG: Do you think Europe is going to be able to get in control of that? We have 28 countries in the EU. And Switzerland is not a member.

TC: So smart, so smart . . . You know why? Because they're mountain people. Love them. You know why? Because they're suspicious, that's what I like about them. [laughter]

UG: Do you think that Europe will get in control of the migration?

TC: The EU has been doomed since the first day because it's inconsistent with human nature. The reason we have nation states is because people wanted them, it's organic. A nation-state is just a larger tribe and it's organized along lines that make sense. They evolved over thousands of years. To ignore it and destroy it because you think that you've got a better idea is insane!

[And with that, our interview concludes. It has already run far past the allotted 40 minutes.]