

After Trump

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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The US Presidential election is over and Donald Trump has lost. While he has convinced his hard core supporters that the election has been stolen from him, he has failed to get sufficient backing from powerful actors to mount a coup. Joe Biden will take office on 20 January.

Biden will have no honeymoon. The previous two Democratic Presidents faced a massive Right wing reaction as soon as they took office, although they had no opposition worth noting from the Left. The Republicans will try a third time to mount a reactionary movement and Trump will probably lead it. Biden campaigned on a platform of being a “normal President” — but “normal” politics is precisely what led to the election of Trump in 2016. Left to his own devices, Biden will bring the Washington establishment even further into disrepute and set the stage for Trump to be re-elected in 2024 (health permitting). Biden will rule for Wall Street, allow inequality to grow unchecked and confine progressive policies to gestures that will infuriate the Right while not satisfying the burning needs of the mass of workers in the US.

There is a new factor. Obama took office when the grassroots Left was small, weak and inexperienced. As a result, there were massive illusions in him, something that demobilised the Left for some years. Under Clinton back in 1992, the situation was even worse. The Left was ideologically shattered by the collapse of the USSR and its organisations were falling to pieces. The capitalists were celebrating the “death of communism” and proclaiming “the end of history”. Now the grassroots left is confident and growing, having left full or partial ideological dependence on the USSR behind it. For the first time since LBJ, a Democratic President will take office with a grassroots challenge from the Left.

The strategy

The social movement in the United States faces a fundamental strategic choice. Either it works through the Democratic Party or against it. Every movement throws up a layer of activists who use it to climb into Parliament, but the crucial issue is whether the movement will follow them and divert itself into Parliamentary channels. The moment the movement tones down its actions or demands to suit the fortunes of Bernie Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, it’s finished as an independent force. It’s not for nothing that the Democratic Party is known in the US as the graveyard of political movements. It’s happened so many times before that activists have no excuse for not seeing it coming.

Anarchist communists in the United States need to avoid being distracted by the siren call of demands to change the Democratic Party. The priority must be to build the grassroots struggle, in whatever sphere it erupts, while engaging patiently with those who think there is currently no alternative to the Democrats. And the argument has to be that “We – the grassroots movement – are the alternative to the Democrats. We’re creating facts on the ground to which all politicians must respond in some way, while the organisations we are building are the new society within the shell of the old.”

The struggle

Finally, we must consider the fields of struggle available. The struggle against the police and their racist violence, the struggle for immigrants’ rights and against borders and the struggle to prevent rampant climate change have all generated strong grassroots movements in recent

years. The first of these struggles is the one that has shaken the United States the most, because US capitalism is founded on the legacy of slavery. The demand that the State merely recognise that Black lives matter is enough to undermine the stability of its order and send the cops into a frenzy of violence.

The militant demonstrations against the police murder of George Floyd, for example, were entirely justified and spread like wildfire. Demonstrators can be beaten off the streets, however, as eventually happened in Minneapolis, Louisville, Atlanta, Portland and elsewhere. What would give this struggle, and all other struggles, the social weight to win would be bringing it into the workplace. If grassroots radicals were strong enough in the labour movement in Minneapolis to force the staging of a one day general strike there, the capitalists would have been hit where it really hurts. Cutting off the flow of profits would achieve far more to defund police and change their behaviour than any amount of reform pursued electorally.

The workplace is the source of the capitalists' power, so the struggle in that location is decisive. It is the vehicle for fighting the economic inequality that is driving down living standards for US workers for the first time since the Great Depression and fuelling the growth of Fascism. It is, though, much more than that. The struggle in the workplace can unite the multi-racial, multicultural and gender diverse working class in the fight against all forms of social oppression and build the solidarity needed to make the revolution to overthrow capitalism as a whole.

After Trump, the fundamental task is the same as before.

BUILD THE CLASS STRUGGLE

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