

President Trump

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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Against majority expectations, last November Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. He was inaugurated in January with the most reactionary Cabinet in living memory. While, considered individually, almost all of his choices (i.e. excepting Steve Bannon) would fit into a government of his Republican rivals, as a whole they represent an attempt to implement a radical shift of US public policy.

Trump has since come under strong pressure from elements within the State to change course. These elements are aligned either to the Democratic Party or to the old guard of the Republicans, the people Trump shoved aside to get the nomination. Such dynamics have dominated the media reportage of Trump and the way he has been going about governing. While they are significant, the MACG believes that there are two far more important considerations. The first is the reason why Trump won and the second is how to build effective opposition to Trump and the forces he has unleashed.

Why Trump Won

Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" struck a chord that the Business As Usual platform of Hillary Clinton did not. It should be noted at the outset that this was setting the bar very low. Clinton was foisted on the Democratic Party membership by a party machine armed with an immense war chest of Wall St money. The Democrats also took for granted a range of US states where the working class was being kicked in the teeth by them, and yet union officials were still expected to deliver their votes. The result was a collapse in the Democrat vote, so that Trump won, despite collecting fewer votes than any Republican this century.

So why did "Make America Great Again" strike that chord? What had changed in the United States so that a candidate who previously would have been disqualified on many counts could actually be elected? Why were some sections of the US capitalist class prepared to break ranks and support Trump?

US Decline

Trump's campaign resonated because he said out loud that the US is declining in power and he promised to change that. Trump's slogan combined three different issues into one compelling vision. The first issue was the huge social changes in the US in the last forty years. Demographic change such as the changing ethnic composition of US society, the rise of working women and the increasing acceptance of LGBTIQ people threatens traditional social hierarchies and lifestyles.

The second issue was the dominance of neoliberalism in the US over that time. The consequences included stagnation of real incomes for most people, loss of opportunity for social advancement for many and monopolisation of the fruits of economic growth by a tiny minority referred to these days as "the 1%".

The third issue was the declining power of the United States on the world stage. It became necessary to wage frequent, inconclusive and increasingly endless wars to defend the world order which the US created but which now seems to benefit other countries more than the US. That is why a large minority of the US electorate and a crucial minority of the US capitalist class decided: that America is no longer great like it used to be. Emergency action is required to Make America Great Again.

Trump is offering the illusion that he can turn back the clock. He can force other countries like Mexico and China to do what Uncle Sam tells them. He can bring back secure jobs to workers impoverished by decades of neoliberalism. He can roll back decades of social change by making America White again. This is not conservatism – it is reaction. It is impossible to achieve and even the attempt will require massive amounts of State violence.

In foreign policy, Trump proposes a radically different approach he is calling “America First”. He believes that the system of alliances which the US has built up over the past years has outlived its usefulness to the US. It carries a heavy overhead cost, without giving the US anywhere near enough benefit. Some people believe that Trump will tend more to isolationism and refrain from fighting so many wars to defend the current order, but they are wrong. Trump’s vision doesn’t lead to fewer wars, but different ones. Trump’s wars will be direct raids for booty, while allies will be asked, “What have you done for us lately?” The question will be asked regularly. It remains to be seen, though, how thoroughly “America First” will be implemented.

What is to be done?

There is already massive opposition to Trump’s presidency in the US and around the world. There are different currents to this opposition, and the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group believes it is essential to distinguish between them in order to advance the interests of the working class. First, it is necessary to distinguish between Trump’s government and the pre-existing Alt-Right movement which he has energised. Second, it is necessary to distinguish between the elements in the anti-Trump resistance which are fundamentally establishment and conservative and those elements which have something to offer the working class, even if some of their offerings are flawed. Finally, it is necessary to understand the best division of labour between movements inside and outside the United States.

The Alt-Right

Donald Trump is a racist populist with a dangerous authoritarian streak. To call him a Fascist, however, is a dangerous mistake. Trump’s government, nasty as it is, operates within the norms of capitalist democracy. Calling Trump a Fascist obscures the danger of the actual Fascists who are now mobilising under his banner and attempting to build gangs of genocidal thugs. The only Fascist in Trump’s Cabinet is Steve Bannon, the former editor of Breitbart.

On the ground, however, all sorts of Fascist and even neo-Nazi groups are emerging to support Trump and push him to fulfil his most extreme rhetoric. At the same time they are engaging in extreme violence against their opponents and are planning vastly more. People like Richard Spencer and Milo Yiannopoulos are key figures in the attempt to crystallise an emerging Fascist network, though as yet they have had limited success in making the transition from keyboard trolls with genocidal fantasies to a cadre of genocidal stormtroopers.

The appropriate response to Right wing populists who operate within the parameters of capitalist democracy is a political mobilisation. The appropriate response to the Fascists attempting to organise in Trump’s reflected glory is reasonable force in self defence. This means that public events organised by or giving a platform to actual Fascists (defined clearly so as to distinguish them from mere Right populists) should be shut down and the participants dispersed. In this case,

self defence encompasses pre-emptive force because their violent intent is not open to reasonable doubt and it is impractical to follow Fascists around waiting for them to attack their intended victims.

Resistance

Large sections of the US ruling class believe that Trump is pursuing dangerous policies in a dangerous way. Perhaps the most notable evidence of the depth of this disaffection is the stream of leaks coming out of the CIA and FBI. The wide variety of activities in the anti-Trump resistance, however, have only two strategic orientations. One is essentially conservative and aims to keep Trump within the bounds of capitalist legality and to build electoral support for the Democratic Party. The other is radical and aims to build a movement with the social power to prevent Trump implementing his program, regardless of its legal status. Such social power can only be based on the working class. Attempts to build this movement based on forces other than the working class have insufficient power and will be dominated by the conservative Democratic Party.

The conservative anti-Trump resistance, while impressive in scope, will fail for two reasons. Firstly, its organisations act to demobilise and disempower grassroots activists, while remaining silent on the areas of continuity between Trump and previous presidents. The Democratic Party has no strategy to deal with Trump's policies if they are upheld by the courts. Democrats will find it difficult to support anti-deportation actions when Barack Obama himself earned the title of "Deporter-in-Chief" by deporting more immigrants than any previous US president. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the conservative anti-Trump resistance cannot address the reasons why Trump came to power in the first place. It has no answer to the ever-growing disparity between rich and poor, no answer to the decay of industrial towns in the mid-West and no answer to the gradual erosion of US primacy in world affairs. Its policies have produced the first two phenomena, while there is no answer to the third. The resistance of the Democratic Party, therefore, is built on sand.

Mobilising effectively can only be done through the working class. The airport mobilisations, while inspiring, stopped with the limited court victories. If airport workers had occupied their workplaces, the challenge to Trump would have been stronger. A few hundred coppers can clear a terminal of protestors, but they cannot find a scab workforce to handle baggage, check tickets, or re-fuel and re-provision planes – let alone fly and staff the planes. The working class has the social power to turn Trump's Executive Orders and his laws into mere pieces of paper.

Two conditions must be met before the working class will mobilise against Trump. First, there must be a program that is clearly in their interests that they can fight for. It is only in the context of the struggle for higher wages and better conditions for all that white workers can be broken from racism and won to the principle of "Touch One, Touch All". Only in the course of struggle will white workers recognise that their racial prejudice is an impediment to their victory. Fighting racism and all other forms of special oppression is an essential part of building the strength of the class sufficient to win.

Second, there must be a recognition of the obstacles on the road – principally the union bureaucracy. In most industrialised countries, and the US in particular, union officials are wedded to conservative industrial and political strategies that guarantee death to unionism. This was displayed to great effect in the US last year when the union bureaucrats, almost to a person,

supported Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries, despite her program being manifestly inferior to Bernie Sanders (who, himself, was unsupportable, though this is a different topic). For workers to mobilise to fight Trump, rather than merely voting against him, will require rank and file networks capable of rolling over the opposition of union bureaucrats. These networks must begin to take the dimensions of a parallel and unofficial union movement outside the control of the officials.

Different tasks in response to the challenge

For the most part, it is only workers inside the US who can take the necessary direct action against Trump. Only they can fight for the program which is necessary to defeat Trump, the old guard Republicans and the Democrats. Direct action against Trump may be possible for some workers outside the US (e.g. workers in US-owned corporations, workers supplying US military bases), but this is necessarily supplementary and guided by the tempo of US events.

Outside the US, the main task will be to continue building resistance to the capitalists in countries where we are. Here in Australia, we must build a movement which can defend wages, jobs, housing and social services, while also consolidating the working class by fighting for Aboriginal rights, refugee rights, abortion and child care rights and the right to same sex marriage. Here in Australia, building resistance means creating a rank and file movement to take on the Laborite bureaucrats who run the unions, but don't defend them against capitalists' attacks.

Finally, the role of Anarchists, whether in the US or elsewhere, is to organise to argue in support of a program of this nature and to play an exemplary role in the struggle for it. Hop to it, comrades.

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