

US presidential elections and world politics: Trump and the Future

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The shocking victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections is a major turning point that is part of, and will give new momentum to, a surge to the right in world politics. Phil Hearse joins the discussion.

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The international situation is dealt with below, but for starters we should note that there is near certainty that the far right will win the Austrian presidential re-run and that Marine Le Pen has a major chance to win the presidential election new year in France.

Most of all though we have to insist that the Trump victory follows on from, and in part of the same trend as, Brexit in Britain. It seems that that the Lexiteers have gone remarkably quiet. No wonder. How can anyone seriously pretend that the new Teresa May government does not represent a shift to the right in bourgeois politics, or that the victory of Brexit was not achieved on the back of a xenophobic anti-immigrant campaign?

Reactionary Electoral Blocs

There are numerous discussions online and in print about the reasons for Trump's victory and who voted for him. Statistically the poorest 20% of the electorate voted for Clinton in their majority (just). Support for Trump was proportionately highest among middle class and upper class voters. But what Trump was able to do, through his xenophobic, racist and protectionist discourse, was forge an electoral bloc including large sections of the racist and reactionary petty bourgeoisie and sections of the working class hit by globalisation and de-industrialisation who think the Democratic Party has deserted them. It was not a majority of the whole working class, but a large chunk of it, enough minority to tip the scales.

That is exactly the same phenomenon – more or less – as the vote for Brexit. The statistically strongest bastions of the Brexit vote were not all impoverished de-industrialised towns, but included enclaves of the petty bourgeoisie in the Home Counties and market towns. The same basic electoral bloc repeats itself in France: very high Front National votes can be found in the former coal mining districts in the North; down at heel Paris suburbs of what was once the 'red belt'; and the posh towns of the Côtes d'Azur settled by the white French Algerians after independence. Of course reactionary votes are not restricted to these two categories, but they are its hard core.

This is a rather classical pattern in the history of fascism and the extreme right. The petty bourgeois (and bourgeois) plus impoverished proletariat twin base is straight out of Trotsky's writings on Germany.

The ability to construct these electoral blocs depends on an ideological discourse – a 'mass line' – that speaks to the different constituencies. In every case in America and Europe where the extreme right has made significant gains this line is anti-immigrant, anti-foreigner, racist and xenophobic. There is no way out of the domination of this line other than directly confronting it. Trying to dodge the issue of racism while concentrating on economic issues never works.

Let's note at this point that the success of racist and xenophobic discourses relies a lot of their relay by the mass media, and the constant appearance and re-appearance of right wing personalities on TV screens and in the newspapers (Farage, Le Pen, Trump). Anti-immigrant xenophobia has become the 'common sense' explanation of continued poverty and economic recession for millions of Americans and Europeans. This is a huge defeat for the workers movement and democracy, and is a function of the partial or total capitulation to xenophobic anti-immigrant politics by liberal parties and social democracy.

What will the Trump victory mean in the US...

People who think that things won't change a lot are day dreaming. In the United States racists and reactionaries of all sorts feel the wind in their sails. A big spike in racist attacks has started (just like Britain post-Brexit), although Trump claims that 'a few minor incidents' have been exaggerated by the media. The full scope of Trumpism, with a racist climate change denier in the presidency and the Republicans tightening their grip on the Congress, cannot be known in full. But what we do know or appears very likely includes:

- The mass deportation or incarceration of 2-3 million Latinos 'criminals' and 'illegal' immigrants. The presages a reign of fear in the Latino communities. Most likely also security agencies will intensify their harassment and repression of Muslim communities.
- The building of the wall/fence seems back on track, despite being an enormous project.
- Trump will remove all restrictions on the production of coal and other fossil fuels. Obama has left it to the incoming regime to sort out the Dakota Access pipeline conflict, and there's no doubt how that will play out.
- Trump plus the Congress will have the power to appoint new Supreme Court judges and have made it clear they intend to appoint anti-abortion judges. Abortion and reproductive rights will come within the ambit of 'states' rights' – ie reactionary states legislatures will be able to confirm or extend their anti-abortion stance. Only two states (New York and Washington State, have completely legalised abortion).
- It's certain that Trump will strong support and encourage anti-democratic and anti-minority repression in America's highly militarised police forces. Any remaining limits on surveillance and torture will be removed.
- Obama's very limited 'Obama care' project will be either struck down or severely modified. The health care situation of the poor will worsen. And this links in with reproductive rights. The health care law gave 47 million women access to preventive health services. It also required insurers to make birth control available at no cost to women, eliminating costly co-payments that in many cases

ran to hundreds of dollars a year or more. After Trump's win women on social media announced plans to obtain IUDs, a form of contraception that can last as long as 12 years but that was prohibitively expensive for many before Obamacare.

- Corporate taxes will be slashed. Given the promises to boost the size of the military and spending on it, this is bound to result in major welfare cuts.

This is far from a complete list. In general the right wing – the hard right of American politics – will be given full sway. The list of certain or possible appointees to the Trump government team makes alarming reading.

Kris Kobach, Kansas secretary of state and architect of anti-immigrant and voter suppression laws in his native state, will be an immigration advisor. Extreme right blogger Stephen Bannon will be a 'senior advisor'. Venomous authoritarian Rudy Giuliani, former governor of New York, will be given a key role. There is even talk of giving a job to Sarah Palin and more outlandish talk of giving John Bolton the Secretary of State position.

Overall the new administration will of course include a large number of business appointees and reinforce an anti-working class, anti-women, anti-ethnic minority stance. Some rump supporters have floated the possibility of bringing back the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

...and internationally

Two things are certain in the international sphere. Trump ('America First') is bound to impose trade tariffs and repudiate trade agreements, boosting inter-imperialist competition and conflict. And he is bound to bolster America's role in aiding right-wing authoritarianism and repression worldwide. Moreover the United States will start to play a wrecking role over international efforts to combat climate change

The obvious target for the former is China. For certain the US will impose new tariffs on things like steel, and maybe some manufactured goods and this will boost political and maybe even military tensions. It is hard to prejudge whether this will lead to all-out protectionism, because the vast majority of the bourgeoisie don't want it, but then the vast majority of them didn't want Trump. This really is a key moment because a liberalised trade regime has been the heart of neoliberal globalisation. Many have made the point that the 2008 crash was a crisis of neoliberalism, but that the bourgeoisie had nothing to replace it with. Maybe it's possible that Trump isolationism and protectionism will evolve into 'post-neoliberalism'. But it's too early to be certain of that.

Trump has already called climate change a 'Chinese hoax' aimed at America. He has already threatened to pull America out of the landmark Paris climate change accord, eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency, repeal environmental regulations, and cut climate funding. Again no one knows exactly what he will do, but it won't be good news

On the military front Trump has promised a massive cash boost for the armed forces, but says he doesn't want unnecessary foreign wars. A lot of people internationally say his admiration for Putin will mean the chance of war over Ukraine is reduced. We'll see. I doubt that the big boost on American military spending is going nowhere. Particularly in the light of Trump's promise to finish off ISIS in six months. The danger of stepped up military action internationally is very real.

One thing that is difficult to define is the international prestige of United States capitalism, part of the key 'soft power' of world politics. Things like the Iraq war and the Vietnam tarnished America's

reputation amongst people worldwide. The election of Obama boosted it. The election of Trump has tarnished it anew.

World politics shifts to the right

Without doubt, the world shift to the right of which Trump's victory is a defining moment, has been profoundly influenced by the defeat of the Arab Spring and its dreadful outcome in Egypt and Syria. The Arab Spring was influenced by mass anti-austerity movements in Europe after 2008 – Greece, France, Spain – but its defeat has had a negative influence in the other direction. In Europe while the far right has surged ahead the anti-austerity movement has for the most part declined – for the moment.

Donald Trump's victory has been enthusiastically greeted by the worst dictators and right wing 'strong men' in the Middle East. Egyptian military dictator Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi already had a meeting with Trump on 19 September in a pre-emptive move to ensure his support. He already said: "Egypt hopes Trump's presidency will breathe a new spirit into US-Egyptian relations." In other words, now we'll have someone to work with who won't keep moaning about human rights abuses.

Turkish president Erdogan has already welcomed Trump's victory (ie now we'll have someone to work with who won't moan about human rights) and invited him to visit Turkey.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu could hardly contain his glee and was the first world leader Trump talked after the election victory. Probably the US will stop complaining about illegal settlements on the West Bank. US support for Israel will intensify, although it would have under Hillary Clinton.

All these things matter. It will begin the change the international political and diplomatic atmosphere and give further US support to vicious repression in the Middle East.

Part of the grim international situation is the semi-collapse of 'Socialism for the 21st Century' in Latin America. The PT government in Brazil is gone, the Venezuelan Bolivarian government is near-certain to fall. If that needs a little push from the military (Maduro's government is so weak that is not certain) then the US under Trump will probably lend a hand.

It seems likely that one section of Latinos who did vote for Trump in large numbers were those of Cuban origin in Florida. Trump in power does not bode well for the US opening towards Cuba.

And in Britain?

The meeting between Trump and Nigel Farage is a direct intervention in British politics, of course engineered by Farage, but Trump knew what he was doing.

The promotion of Farage comes at a time when he is using the Brexit vote and its aftermath to re-establish and reorganise the hard right. His December demonstration to the Supreme Court, stewarded formally or informally by BNP and EDL thugs, represents a new stage in the Moseleyisation of the Farage movement. Control of the streets, whenever and wherever they wanted it, was a key part of the Moseley and Nazi movements because control of the streets gives you the power to intimidate anyone.

Brexit and Trump as mutually reinforcing movements have created a very dangerous time in UK politics. We have a right-wing Tory government under pressure from the right. In this defensive situation we need a mass movement to defend immigrants and fight racism. But most of all we need, while pushing forward the Corbyn movement, to take mass anti-austerity and anti-racist consciousness in the direction of anti-capitalism.

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P.S.

* <http://socialistresistance.org/trump-and-the-future/9220>