

US Election 2024 : What are our options ? Slouching Toward November

mercredi 28 août 2024, par [Against the Current](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 26 août 2024).

FACING THE HIDEOUS specter of a second Trump presidency, the operational leadership of the Democratic Party — that is, the party mega-donors — ultimately took the reins and pushed aside its all-too-visibly declining incumbent standard-bearer. From the voting base on July 21 came the instant response : “Free at last, free at last thank God Almighty (and Covid), we’re free of Biden at last !”

[This is the final version of this editorial, slightly revised and expanded from an earlier online version which we published on ESSF.]

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In this issue of *Against the Current*, we present three opinion pieces on tactical voting options for socialists in November (these were drafted before Biden’s withdrawal and slightly updated for publication). We won’t summarize those here — nor are we interested in the syrupy sentimentality over Joe Biden’s “selfless legacy” coming from one side, or the vilification coming from the other.

As our readers will already know, whatever grades may be assigned to Biden’s handling of the economy or NATO or immigration, trade policy or anything else, on Israel *and Gaza it’s below F-minus : G for Genocide*.

In this respect at least, the none-too-soon end of Biden’s candidacy is a partial victory for the pro-Palestinian solidarity struggle — those “uncommitted” primary votes, the college encampments, the sit-ins and local resolutions demanding ceasefire. It’s not that the ascendancy of Kamala Harris in itself solves anything, or that her own record on Palestinian rights is any better on substance. But the movement for Palestine has moved the needle of public opinion and shown that the catastrophe in Gaza can’t be shoved back into the twilight.

The International Court of Justice ruling on the illegality of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank — although international law in practice does not apply to Israel, due to the permanent U.S. dispensation — is also a helpful embarrassment for Washington’s enabling of ethnic cleansing.

Will Arab and Muslim communities so rightly enraged by the Biden enabling of Israel’s genocide, despite Harris’ complicity, be prepared to give her at least a hearing ? Can she show enough decent compassion for the Palestinian people’s unending catastrophe — if not an alternative policy that’s desperately required — that they might listen ? Too soon to predict, but it might make the difference in Michigan and perhaps the national outcome.

The Road to Monarchy ?

Mostly, however, we want to focus here on the condition of U.S. politics that have brought us to the present moment of slouching toward November's "existential" election.

The Republican Party shows the spectacle of a well-oiled and lavishly funded cult, the providential gift of an attempted assassination having elevated Trump to demigod status. A substantial sector of billionaires and corporate elites have come over to Trump, and the monarchist Supreme Court majority's "immunity" ruling overtly paves the way for the coronation of King Donald I.

This time, Trump's royal court would be the far-right cadres of Project 2025, who may have made the mistake of going too public with their Christian-supremacist agenda and plans for mass deportation camps, tax cuts and civil service purges. Trump of course hasn't read the 900 pages of Project 2025's plans — but his own announced economic policies of massive tariffs and permanent tax cuts for corporations and billionaires would be both inflationary and ruinous for the budget and the population.

By the third year of Trump's term he'd be older than Biden is now and his alt-right protégé J.D. Vance would be poised to run for a full two terms. Vance's statements about "cat women" taking over political life, it must be said, are stunning even by MAGA standards. And Trump's unhinged comment at the Christian-nationalist Turning Point rally informed attendees that "you'll never have to vote again" in the event he's elected. (*New York Times*, July 26, 2024)

In this climate, the threat is clear and present : the actual destruction of even the flawed democratic structures that have evolved under the ambiguous rubric of the U.S. Constitution.

The Trump-Vance agenda includes open cheerleading for Israel's Gaza genocide and rampant ethnic cleansing of Palestine — along with indifference if not active support for Russia's drive to turn Ukraine into another Gaza. (In this respect, at least they're consistent.)

Whatever the outcome this November, four years from now the United States along with the rest of the world will be experiencing climate-change disasters of magnitudes we can barely imagine now. The restoration of full-scale death-to-the-environment Republican policies would go a long way toward making the global crisis irreversible.

With Biden's stumbling candidacy, the Democratic leadership's apparent incapacity to remove him had turned by mid-July to a mixture of paralysis and panic. His nick-of-time withdrawal left no option except the instant pivot to Kamala Harris.

The vice-presidential choice of Minnesota governor Tim Walz adds a touch of Midwest popular liberalism, in contrast to the appalling J.D. Vance specter. It didn't risk sacrificing a Senate seat (as selecting Mark Kelly from Arizona might have done) — and most important, at least for cosmetic if not substantive policy purposes, it avoided nominating someone tied to longterm support of Israel's longterm ethnic cleansing and genocide in Palestine.

As *Against the Current* will go to press shortly before the Democratic convention, it's an open question whether the campaign can sustain the cohesion, unity and energy to defeat Trump. It certainly won't lack funding !

At its core, of course, the same corporate agenda remains. In any case the Democrats' ability to deliver on promises to restore abortion rights, expand environmental protections or anything else would be dim at best in what are likely to be closely divided Houses of Congress, quite possibly with

either or both under Republican majorities.

These short-term projections, however, get nowhere near the full depth of the U.S. political crisis.

Paradoxically Speaking

The Republican Party, contrary to widely promoted nonsense, is in no meaningful sense a populist, let alone a “workers’ party.” As much if not more than ever it’s a party of plutocracy, privilege and unrestrained corporate greed. Yet astonishingly it captures a large working-class vote, both union and nonunion.

That Includes for example an estimated half of working Teamsters, which explains why Teamster president Sean O’Brien turned up to speak at the Republican convention, leaving delegates a bit unsure what to make of his denunciation of companies’ and “both parties’” trampling on working people’s rights. (To be sure, they got over it quickly enough.)

On the other side, UAW president Shawn Fain doubled down on the union’s early endorsement of Biden, then instantly and predictably came out for Harris. What’s regrettably missing in each case is an open, democratic discussion within the unions’ memberships about whom they would support, including possible third-party options — the kind of healthy activating process that’s urgently needed as we increasingly witness a reckoning moment for the future of labor and progressive politics.

While the working-class Republican vote is certainly disproportionately (not exclusively) white, this cannot be attributed solely to racism, Christian fundamentalism, the appeal of Hulk Hogan or other glib conventional explanations, although these are real factors. The plain fact — as we aren’t unique in pointing out — is that both capitalist parties for four decades have embraced a gospel of globalization, deregulation and technocracy that left behind huge sectors of the population, abandoned whole regions of rural and smaller-town America, and widened inequality to the most obscene levels.

We might add here that these are generally the communities most heavily impacted by climate-induced disasters, while drill-baby-drill politicians spew contempt on any programs (“Green New Scam”) or regulations that might alleviate the slide toward ecocide.

Housing, access to education, medical care, food security and hopes for a decent future are slipping away from tens of millions of people. A shocking proportion of U.S. households (37% by some accounts, although the statistic’s meaning is contested) would scramble to meet a \$400 emergency expense. It’s not so much a question of absolute poverty as one of deepening anxiety, insecurity and fear that naturally gave rise to resentments that can be readily manipulated by rightwing opportunist fake-“populism.”

None of this is exactly “breaking news.” Bernie Sanders has been talking for decades about the ravages of policies that enrich “the billionaire class” and “the one percent” at the expense of the great majority. Reverend William Barber of the New Poor Peoples Campaign eloquently appeals for a multiracial movement drawing on the reality that a majority of the poor and insecure in America are white.

The Democratic Party is institutionally uninterested in the moderate social-democratic reforms that have made Bernie Sanders overwhelmingly popular — Medicare for all (single-payer health care), free public college tuition, stopping corporate welfare. Still less is the Democratic establishment

prepared to embrace Rev. Barber's movement in the streets.

In the absence of appeals to genuine pro-worker and yes, authentic populist solutions, false and even crazy explanations arise — not spontaneously, but from the bottomless lagoon of the rightwing conspiracy industry : inflation is rampant (in fact it's easing), crime is skyrocketing (actually it's falling, despite weekly mass shootings), the border crisis is Biden's creation (it's 100% bipartisan), illegal immigrants are bringing a crime and drug wave, and voting in droves (they aren't, of course), and on and on.

Facing the most anti-labor, plutocratic and anti-civil rights Republican Party in at least 80 years, the Democrats can only turn to the stereotypical "suburban moms" to compensate for the erosion of their labor voting base and weakening of support in other sectors, especially the critical and growing Latine communities.

Ever since the unhinged Supreme Court Dobbs ruling, the Democrats have been able to ride a wave of energy for abortion rights, which may save them in 2024 as well. African American women, who were essential to Biden's 2020 election, will provide a critical base of support rallying around Kamala Harris. Trump's obscene questioning "when did she turn Black ?" signals how dirty the attacks will become.

Crisis for the Left

Again, we are not talking a stand here on the voting options discussed in the opinion pieces in this issue of Against the Current, on which we'll welcome readers' thoughts. Here we will comment briefly on a perennial issue vexing the left in this country.

In our previous issue (#231, July-August 2024), Part One of historian August Nimtz's extensive exploration of "What Does It Mean to Vote ?" (the second part appears in this issue) lays out a lesson that Karl Marx learned as long ago as 1850 : the working class and the revolutionary party should never subordinate its independent electoral expression to supporting a liberal or lesser-evil bourgeois choice.

That is excellent guidance, then and now. Sadly, in the United States of America, the most politically backward country in the "developed" capitalist world, there is no working-class party of any stripe — small, medium or large, reformist or revolutionary or anything in between. Nor is there a populist or mass movement party on the immediate horizon.

Politics in the United States, with some local exceptions, remain trapped in the Republican and Democratic capitalist duopoly. The Green Party is a progressive option, which still represents potential rather than class-based reality.

Breaking from the grip of the two capitalist parties is partly a task for the socialist left, but will depend more critically on the emergence of mass social insurgencies of labor and oppressed people's communities.

The outcome of the November election may, or may not, stave off the immediate prospect of a full-blooded far-right presidency with its sickening consequences for democratic rights in the United States, for any hope of environmental policy, for forces of democracy and social justice in many parts of the world.

What will not change are the enormous inequalities that are choking our society, the ever-expanding

military budget, and escalating tensions with rivals for world imperialist domination and always present apocalypse.

We see in today's upsurge in solidarity for Palestinian freedom — as we've seen before in the struggles for marriage equality, Queer and trans rights and the response to racist police brutality — that organized movements from below do make a difference in politics. Whether in resistance to Trump's semi-fascism or in confronting another Democratic administration, our movement-building responsibilities remain paramount.

The Editors, *Against the Current*

P.-S.

- « Slouching Toward November ». *Against the Current* No. 232, September/October 2024 : <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc232/a-letter-from-the-editors-slouching-toward-november/>
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