

When the circus leaves town - A Tempest editorial on the eve of the 2024 elections

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The 2024 elections represents a choice between a rightward moving Democratic Party, led by Kamala Harris, the new “A Team” of U.S. imperialism and Donald Trump’s Republican Party, the uniquely U.S. contribution to the international trend of hateful far right authoritarianism. There is little to nothing that the socialist movement can do on November 5 to change this dynamic. But a serious reckoning with how we got here and the post-election tasks of the Left is critical to raising our collective horizons beyond the future threatened by both sides.



Even short of the announcement of who will lead the empire along its bloody path of decline, the 2024 U.S. presidential election is a blaring siren. It warns of the exhaustion of the U.S. political order and an evolving constitutional crisis.

It has featured, on the one hand, a confident and growing far right movement, openly [backed](#) by a coterie of billionaire bros, with their eyes set on retribution against an expansive list of the “[enemies within](#).” Donald Trump himself is a manifestly racist, hateful, stupid, and criminally wily [lumpen capitalist](#). We need not reach for any armchair gerontology, neurology, psychology, or psychiatry. The fact that he is on pace to win seventy-plus millions of votes is a profound symptom of decay.

The other choice? A hand-picked representative of a governing elite incapable of reckoning with its own exhaustion. The Democratic Party, led by Kamala Harris, is alienated from the mass of the U.S. population, and, whatever its feints, increasingly committed to a nationalist politics feeding the open attacks on democratic rights. They seek to claim the mantle as [the best managers](#) to oversee imperial hegemony and the mass murder and genocide the role requires. Harris herself is a [self-proclaimed](#) (and manifestly non-lumpen) capitalist with [deep ties](#) to silicon valley, a re-found pride in [being a cop](#); she is also a consistent [defender of Zionism](#).

Harris is a perfect leader for a Democratic Party that has moved so far to the right that its current infatuation with [neo-conservative war criminals](#) is not an outlier. Harris has been endorsed not only by the Cheneys but by a host of other former members of [every Republican administration](#) going back to Reagan. She is actively campaigning with them and has announced both that she will include a Republican in her cabinet and set up a bipartisan advisory committee to oversee her presidency. The Democrats have effectively morphed into the pre-Trump Republican Party, seeking to prove their bona fides as the A Team of American capitalism. The implications of this wholesale shift to the center-right has opened political space and provided a veneer of mainstream legitimacy to the most

egregious of Trump's policy prescriptions, notably [the call for mass deportations](#). In the U.S., and as has been [the case internationally](#) and historically, adopting the position of the right only benefits the far right.

Following Biden, a Harris/ Walz administration promises continuity as "[willing contributors to the controlled demolition of the 1990s post-cold war order](#)," constraining China and buttressing U.S. power. With the cynical exception of abortion rights—which the Democratic Party over decades indisputably contributed to losing—most of what are touted as policy "advances" are coincident with an [imperial logic](#) built around the needs for secure information technology, purportedly "clean energy," and defense manufacturing capabilities. The efforts of the Democratic Party "left" to secure advances [beyond "Bidenomics"](#) have [yielded next to nothing](#).

Despite the estimated [\\$16 billion](#) being spent this election cycle—If the elections this century are [any guide](#)—between forty and fifty percent of the voting age population will not vote. Yet we are subject to this well funded spectacle attempting to cynically delimit our political horizons as our collective [manifold crises](#) deepen.

No wonder that the over-riding experience of this election is deep seated anxiety and fear. Add to this the [historically high](#) unfavorability ratings of the candidates, and expectations for the future are depressed. Not surprisingly, both campaigns have attempted to recuperate this reality, framing their campaigns, respectively, as being about "[hope and optimism](#)" or a "[love fest](#)."

This campaign is a continuation of decades of lesser-evil elections with deep historic and structural roots in the minoritarian, and anti-democratic traditions of the U.S. republic. The two-(capitalist) party system, the electoral college, racist voter disenfranchisement, and the suffocating role of the billionaires and big capital are features, not bugs.

In the aftermath of this white-out blizzard of a spectacle and the forced march to the ballot box, we must ask both how we got here and how we should respond. This campaign is a continuation of decades of lesser-evil elections with deep historic and structural roots in the minoritarian and anti-democratic traditions of the U.S. republic. The two-(capitalist) party system, the electoral college, racist voter disenfranchisement, and the suffocating role of the billionaires, and big capital are features of this system, not bugs.

On the other hand, we are witnessing a very specific conjunctural moment—we can call it [exhausted neo-liberalism](#), or [disaster nationalism](#)—but in the U.S. it is no coincidence that the rise of Trump and rampant reaction, comes on the heels of more than a decade of mass popular and working-class responses to the post-2008 economic crisis.

There is much need to discuss and debate the efforts and experience of the social movements and the Left in the period from approximately 2008 to 2020. However, it is indisputable that, especially at the level of electoral politics, we have failed to make any significant steps towards independent political representation. More generally, we've come out of that experience with our organized forces weakened. And the lack of an independent left pole plays a critical role in allowing the far right, [including its fascist elements](#), to masquerade as the opposition to a status quo, a status quo that is rightly seen as precarious and threatening by working people concerned about survival and

looking for answers and a path forward.

No doubt there are profound implications for the U.S. and world ruling classes in this election, and as a result, there are different, real stakes for the rest of us. Yet there is little to no meaning in what the tiny revolutionary Left in the U.S. does on November 5.

Given how readily the supporters of Palestinian liberation have been marginalized and mocked by the Democratic Party, and given the decades-long struggle to build third party viability, we are sympathetic with those who are [looking towards the Green Party](#) and Jill Stein. Many are rightly refusing to give their votes to candidates endorsing genocide and refusing to give into a logic that falsely demands such a vote to “stop fascism.” They are looking for an alternative. Yet there is no organizational benefit to the Left, in the broadest sense, in campaigning for Jill Stein. And this is aside from [substantive](#) and deep political differences including on [questions of imperialism](#), in particular, that we have with Stein and the Green Party. At the risk of our throwing stones in the glass house of the Left, the Green Party has proven over decades to be incapable of building healthy local organizations of the independent left between elections. Such efforts have to be a collective strategic priority.

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The lessons we learn —from [this election cycle](#), from the last fifteen-plus years of struggles, and [from decades](#) of prior [failed experiments](#) in subordinating independent working-class politics to a thoroughly capitalist Democratic Party—must inform what we do going forward. The stakes in rebuilding an independent Left, not bound by a strategy that treats elections as the primary motor of social change, are immeasurable. And the stakes in rebuilding independent institutions of and by working-class communities (in all of our diversity) are existential.

Struggle from below remains the key to defend our rights and advance our demands. In particular, the struggle for Palestinian liberation, which inevitably calls the question on U.S. imperialism, is key and urgent in the here and now. Palestinians face genocide in their homelands and the movement faces McCarthyite repression here in the U.S. and internationally. That reality enjoins us to fight and to start to win the political unity necessary to build a party of our own for the Left, the working class, and the oppressed.

We can only hope that those on the Left, who in the last year-plus (and in decades past) have expended their energies and our collective resources on campaigning for the Democratic Party, exert even a fraction of this energy in support of this needed collective effort. But there are debates among comrades and class fighters. And then there is our collective struggle against the proud defenders of a capitalist system who are leading us, again, towards more ruin. We do not confuse the two.

Whatever the results of the elections, we are assured of at least a few outcomes. The far right is not going away, and until we build a reliable independent pole of the Left in the U.S. and internationally, its political momentum is unlikely to slow and the material wreckage it brings will increase

geometrically. The constitutional structures and institutions of the U.S. republic will increasingly be under attack and will have ever less credibility as a reliable bulwark, strategically or tactically, to protect democratic rights. Relatedly, the attacks on these basic democratic rights—[free speech](#), bodily autonomy, voting, free movement, anti-discrimination, and the rights to collective and concerted action, not to mention health care, education, etc.— will deepen. And the Democratic Party has demonstrated that it is at best an unreliable ally (abortion, gender rights) and more often, and increasingly, an outright enemy acting in concert with, and providing political cover to, the far right (immigration, free speech).

Should Harris be declared the victor, we can expect more of the [political violence](#) that had its practice run [on January 6, 2020](#). And a Trump victory threatens even worse.

But regardless of the outcome, and whatever the past strategic debates within the Left, there will be an absolute urgency to create open, democratic organizing spaces in the service of the movements needed to defend our collective democratic rights and our communities. We should enter this process with an explicit goal of forging greater political unity and stronger organizations of the Left. This will require a seriousness equal to this moment and its stakes, a silver lining born of the dark clouds of this election.

Tempest National Committee

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