

Interview

Elections (United States) - Trump vs Harris: how did the U.S.A. get here? A look at history

Friday 29 November 2024, by [AMARAL Aaron](#), [CAMFIELD David](#) (Date first published: 19 November 2024).

David Camfield interviews Tempest's Aaron Amaral about the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the development of the two-party system, and the history and possibility of mass challenges from below for an episode of podcast Victor's Children. What follows is a transcript of that interview, edited for length and clarity.

David Camfield: *The 2024 U.S. presidential election is truly awful. On the one hand, a far right billionaire, former president, whose supporters have taken control of the Republican Party away from the Conservatives, whose party it once was. On the other, the outgoing Democratic vice president who champions the U.S. capitalist status quo and merges the defense of liberal, civil, and political rights against the far right's threat with support for strengthening U.S. imperialism and its rivalry with China, continuing to enable Israel's war on Palestinians, and now in Lebanon, and so on.*

How did the U.S.A., which is still the most powerful society in global capitalism, come to be in this situation? To discuss this, I'm joined by Aaron Amaral. Could you introduce yourself?

Aaron Amaral: Hi, David. I'm very glad to be here. I think what you're doing with the podcast is a really important contribution to the Left and the socialist movement.

To say a few things about myself: I'm a longtime socialist based in New York City. My radicalization and activism dates from the mid-1980s and includes a lot of international solidarity and anti-imperialist organizing. Professionally, I work as a labor attorney with municipal unions here in the City. And my primary political work these days is as a member of the Tempest Collective, a small but vibrant revolutionary socialist organizing project in North America.

I'm also one of the editors of [Tempestmag.org](https://tempestmag.org) and I am on the editorial board of [New Politics](#), which I imagine many of your listeners know as a pretty well established journal of "socialism from below" politics.

DC: *Unlike other long standing capitalist democracies, the United States has a political system which is dominated by two parties, only two.*

And those parties are also not organized in a way that would be familiar to those, for example, in the UK and many other places. We're familiar with parties that actually have memberships and local chapters or branches. So, can you take us back in U. S. history, for the sake of those of us who don't really know that history, to explain how this two-party system came to be?

AA: I think there are multiple intertwined histories that have to be disentangled to answer the question.

First is the history of the U. S. Constitution itself which structures the Republic and is a product of both the compromise of the various ruling class factions in the colonial period and an explicit effort to do a few other things depending on the colony: to maintain minority rule; to protect the institutions of slavery; to facilitate the growth of what was then, in the late 18th century, a nascent financial and industrial capitalist class.

Second is the history of the development of U.S. settler-colonial capitalism, the disputes within sections of the ruling elite, and the evolution of party politics in each period of that development. Party organizations have been driven, in the first instance, by the strategic debates and perspectives of different fractions of the U.S. ruling class historically.

The third strand is the history of popular struggles for democracy in the context of the first two. These struggles have forced open, intermittently, the question of democratic rights and voting rights, the overthrow of slavery, and critical issues of reform, depending on the historical moment. These reform efforts often will then be adapted by the various party formations as necessary components of their coalitions or as a part of their platforms.

Just a few things on each strand. With regards to the U. S. Constitution, the structure of the U.S. republic is premised, from the beginning, on limiting the franchise to only property-owning men, based on qualifications set by the states. This included disproportionate slave owner representation based on the three-fifths compromise. The idea being that because the southern slave states were less populated by white, property-owning, Protestant men, the slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person to give additional representation to slave owners. It also included a bicameral government, so instead of a unicameral parliament, there's a higher chamber, the Senate, which in its initial iteration was not directly elected. Further insulation from direct democratic control. It also included, as a co-equal branch of government, an independent executive. This was also insulated from democratic control through an electoral college tied to the states. There's also an undemocratic judiciary that has historically claimed for itself the right to broad based judicial oversight of the constitution.

On the second strand, I mentioned the party system and questions of ruling class representation. The first party system goes back to the period immediately following the American Revolution and was reflective of the struggle about what the nascent republic would look like: The question of the relative power of monied, small manufacturing, small landowner interests; the question of state rights; the response to the French Revolution; and the extent to which there was going to be an integrated national security apparatus.

The second party system begins in the aftermath of the war of 1812, and the failed invasion of Canada. It marks a particular moment of the expansion of settler colonialism into the west and parts of the southern United States, driven by a populist effort that expands the voting base, but on an explicitly racist and expansionist basis. In this period, the Democrats in the South created a base among slave owners and the white population while the Whigs, at that time, were connected to northern factory interests. Parts of the northern Whigs, evolved into the Republican Party connected to explicitly anti-slavery forces, a nascent northern working class, and small farmers (the so called-Free Soil movement) that led to the election of Abraham Lincoln as president on a plurality vote.

After the failure of post-Civil War Reconstruction, there's a third party political period which was defined by the expansion of industrial capitalism. The Republican party, because of its credibility after the Civil War, is able to maintain power, not so much as the party that overthrew slavery, but as the party of expansive, industrial capitalism.

The late-nineteenth century Republican Party, in collaboration with the former slaveocracy in the

South, maintained the two-party system into the early 20th century. Through this period, the Democratic Party developed a new coalition which brought together that older Southern class base, based on the Jim Crow white South, and a growing base of a new municipal party political machine tied to immigrant communities in the North.

The period after the Second World War is one of relative stability and unprecedented economic growth. So, a very stable two-party system follows with both parties committed to U. S. imperialism—for the first time as a world hegemon. The Republican Party at that moment still represents the party of big capital.

Nonetheless, the Nixon election in the early seventies represents an important evolution of the Republican Party. Nixon starts to break the Democratic Party stranglehold on the Jim Crow South. And there's an important political realignment so that the Republican Party through the Nixon and Reagan era increasingly starts to represent the most open kind of reactionary forces of U.S. racism historically—located mainly, but not exclusively, in the South. Yet the Republican Party remained very committed to the expansion of U.S. empire and the national security state along with its long-standing ties to finance capital.

That's the potted history of U.S. party politics. I'll say more later on the third issue of popular movements because the possible breaks from the two-party system are intimately tied to the questions of popular movements for democratic rights at different moments.

DC:*That's very helpful. Thanks. I do want to ask if you could say a little bit about the most important times when the two-party system has been really seriously challenged and how those challenges were defeated.*

AA: I think the two most important are, first, in the late 19th century, with the Populist movement, and then in the early 20th century into the 1930s, with the socialist and labor movement. Both are attempts to reckon with the ravages of the development of industrial capitalism. In the context of the Populist movement in particular, you see a rise in the late 1880s and 1890s, particularly in the South, of a movement of small farmers who are heavily indebted, who are not being benefited by the Democratic Party controlled big landowners and develop a growing alliance with Black sharecroppers and small farmers, along with the nascent labor party efforts in the North, for example the Knights of Labor.

There's an effort to give an electoral expression to this alliance. There are very important struggles that take place around issues of racism and democratic rights in the South and questions of debt. And in the North there are really important labor struggles in the context of, in particular, the expansion of the railway system.

In terms of the electoral expression, it's pretty incredible to look back on it now. There were numerous elected Populists across the South and the Midwest representing this democratic instinct. In the election of 1892 James Weaver took more than one million votes and won five states and twenty-two electoral college votes.

This was largely defeated. There's a whole history here but the Democratic Party, which was largely kept out of the presidency and federal office in the post-Civil War period, was able to co-opt the movement and electorally incorporate much of it into the Democratic Party. For example, Williams Jennings Bryant, was able on the basis of the least common denominator expression of the populist movement, which was (pro-debtor) to win the Democratic Party nomination in 1896.

The second moment of a possible break with the two-party system occurred in the early 20th century,

with the rise of the labor and socialist movements. There are very important electoral breakthroughs by a nascent socialist party led by Eugene Debs.

In the early 1910s, there were victories at the municipal and state levels across the country, mainly in the Northeast and Midwest by explicit socialists who represented a range of politics reflective of social democracy at that period more generally, including its left to right spectrum.

So this is not all revolutionary socialist politics, but includes reform minded socialists, so called sewer socialists. These were municipal reformers. This is tied to both the labor movement, but also to really significant movements for social reform, particularly in the urban landscape, which with the explosion of free market, industrial capitalism was often a living nightmare.

Eugene Debs, in prison because of his opposition to the First World War, wins a million votes in 1920. (There was some discussion of the parallels with Trump when he was facing the real possibility of prison time before the election earlier this year, i.e. before the Supreme Court bailed him out.)

And with the growth, in particular after the Russian Revolution, of the left wing of the socialist movement, the importance of the Communist Party, in particular, and the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the growing labor movement, there were real possibilities of an electoral break. I encourage people to go and read some of the writing of Charlie Post on the [history of the Popular Front](#).

The Communist Party (U.S), was not a mass party like in parts of Western Europe, but still had thousands, if not tens of thousands, of cadre members in the context of the kind of burgeoning labor movement at the time. In this moment, there were real possibilities to construct militant industrial unions that would be independent of the Democratic Party and independent of the bosses. There were also real important possibilities for multiracial unity and struggle explicitly around questions of race and racism.

And there was the possibility of independent working class electoral expressions: the creation of a labor party was very much on the agenda. And when you ask the question of why the U.S. is different from Canada or Western Europe, this experience and the failure to create a labor party in the 1930s is a really important moment. There was no third party breakthrough and an opportunity was missed to create a *lasting* minority revolutionary socialist current in the United States. Such a current once existed and was rooted in the working class and amongst the vanguard of militant trade unionists and workers in the 1930s into the 1940s.

And to have had that expression politically of revolutionary socialist politics within that movement would have been an incredibly important breakthrough. Unfortunately, and again, this is a little bit of a potted history, but part of the answer here is that the Communist Party was answerable to Soviet foreign policy and turned to a popular front politics, which in the interest of Soviet policy and, and trying to build alliances with the Roosevelt administration in particular was seeking alliances with the Democratic Party and made an argument that we could build socialism through through an alliance with sections of the capitalist class.

In the United States context, the Popular Front deprioritized building an independent labor party, an independent class expression in the labor movement, and encouraged the building of coalitions with the Democratic Party.

It's important to emphasize here, with these two instances, that the development of social power and social movements is key and is what creates the possibility of an electoral break. These were not, in

the first instances, simply strategies built on seeking electoral power.

That said, there were other moments of potential third party electoral breakthroughs. If you think about the global justice movement in 1999 and 2000 and the Nader campaign that came after them. Or if you think about the efforts in the late 1960s, the Peace and Freedom Party emerges as an expression of the anti-war and anti-racist movements. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, also emerging as an expression of the Black freedom struggle, is another kind of moment.

And we could also talk about the post-2008 economic crisis and the Left's illusions of the Sanders campaign as offering a possible route to a third party break from the Democratic Party. This, of course, has failed to materialize, and as some of us always argued, was never on the cards with that campaign.

[T]he two-party electoral circus is really understood by a significant section of U.S. citizens as an expression of their lack of social power, implicitly or explicitly.

DC: *So, for a long time, both Republicans and the Democrats were parties of the U. S. capitalist class, which for listeners in Canada or Britain, you know, it's a bit like the way that you have the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party in those societies, but they were drawing their leaderships and their voter support from different parts of social classes and from somewhat different regions within the U.S. Can you just very briefly say something about what the situation looked like before the Great Recession of 2008-2009, so just at the beginning of the 21st century?*

AA: There's an important distinction between the Democratic Party coalition that was built out of the Roosevelt administration, out of the Popular Front, in the post-War period, in a period of massive economic growth, which was based on the longstanding, centuries old, Democratic Party, Southern stronghold of big landowners and a racist leadership along with important sections of the Northern municipal political machines that were able to, through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, oversaw very important reforms, including, in the context of the mass civil rights movement, civil rights legislation.

There's a difference between that expression of the Democratic Party and what evolves in the neoliberal period in the early 21st century. After the explosions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nixon comes to power with a new electoral coalition that starts to win the southern Democratic base over to the Republican Party and the context for reforms to the Democrat municipal party machine.

Democratic party machines and the constituent parts in the labor movement and the black movement weaken. And what you see starting with Bill Clinton, but all through the period of Barack Obama, is a consolidation of a new leadership and a new coalition of the Democratic Party in the face of a changing Republican Party. This is something we see throughout Western capitalism, which is the kind of movement of the historic center, center-left reformist parties moving very explicitly to the right and the center right in the context of the growth and the stabilization of capitalism in the neoliberal system.

So, the Clinton campaign was very explicitly directed at, breaking from the promises of the post-War Democratic Party coalition and was much more business friendly. Hillary Clinton, who then later ran

in 2016, expressed this as the Democrats running as Eisenhower Republicans. She explicitly talked about Democrats essentially adopting the kind of politics that had been, in the mid-20th century, the Team A for U.S. capitalism. In the neoliberal period, there's a continuing weakening of the popular base within the Democratic Party, a turn towards closer ties to new and growing sections of capital and information technology.

There's also an effort by both parties to outdo themselves as the strongest party of national defense— the arms industry, national security, border security, etc.. So, in the early 21st century, you see both parties moving to the right.

The Nader campaign in 2000 is really representative of a kind of exhaustion with that dynamic. But this is how you get Bill Clinton. This is how you get George W. Bush. And this is how you get the subsequent disastrous invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan with the quiescence and complicity of the Democratic Party in large measure.

DC: *And then you have 2008, 2009, the so-called Great Recession bringing to an end the long period of capitalist expansion— the neoliberal era from the early 1980s on. There's a turning point in terms of capitalism encountering real difficulties to having sustained accumulation and high rates of profit, the period that we're still in. So, what has happened to the Republican Party since the Great Recession? How did it come to be taken over?*

This, I think, is something that's not appreciated enough by a lot of people. How it's changed and it's been taken over now by far-right forces that, in fact, are really out of alignment with most of the U. S. capitalist class.

AA: There's a story to be told here generally and not just about the U.S. Internationally, in the advanced capitalist countries in the late neoliberal period, 2007-2008 is obviously a moment of profound crisis of accumulation. And the historic ruling class parties begin to no longer be able to meet the challenge of this crisis.

So, it's important to talk about the extreme social crisis that arises post 2007-2008. For example, there's an unprecedented drop in life expectancy in the U.S. This is a blow to the notion of U.S. exceptionalism and the expectation that the experience of the 1950s and 1960s, normalized as a supposedly permanent state of "ever upwards, ever onwards," would continue.

The expectation that the next generation is always going to be in a better social and economic position than its parents' generation is brutally destroyed in the post-2008 period.

If you look at the window between 2008 and 2020, for example, there are incredible statistics that speak to this social crisis. I already mentioned the unprecedented drops in life expectancy that we hadn't seen in this country since the Great Depression. If you start looking at indigenous communities and Hispanic and Black communities it's significant, but even in white communities there are notable drops in the relatively privileged material positions of whites.

Increases in suicide rates, especially for younger workers, explosions of drug use and drug overdose deaths are symptoms of this broader social crisis. We also see radical shrinking of wages and wage growth. And in particular for a younger generation of wage earners.

And in this context, we see an explosion of social struggle, including the beginning of renewed labor militancy going back to the struggles in Wisconsin over labor rights. If you think about Occupy Wall Street and the nascent way of raising class politics, the problems of the 1%, and you think about the explosion of anti-racist struggle culminating in the George Floyd uprising. We see, in this period,

levels of social explosion that we hadn't seen in this country since the 1960s.

And that took expression, electorally, with the Bernie Sanders campaign. It also took some expression earlier with the hope and expectations in the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president, although he himself really represented continuity. He had been a member of the Democratic Leadership Council and his politics were very much in line with the neoliberal turn of the Democratic Party. In the broad, Democratic Party constituency, there was this idea, wrong though it was, that Obama's election was going to bring some real change, which did not happen. And then he successfully navigated the worst of the crisis in capital's interests and on the backs of the working class and oppressed communities.

I think what we see with the Republican Party and the turn towards an extreme kind of right wing populism—and I'll say something more explicitly about the basis of the Trump coalition later—is really a response to those social explosions and also a response to what was seen by that right-wing movement as the government's failure to properly respond to the crisis of U.S. empire. So Trump's focus on China as the problem and his criticisms of neoconservative wars (George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq) is not coincidental and speaks to a really deep-seated isolationism.

Trump is able to speak to an always existing electorate that includes a very right wing social conservative base and has its roots in the white ruling classes of the South. Most importantly, he's also able to appeal to a heavily dislocated petty bourgeoisie that was similarly impacted by the social crisis after 2007-2008, but was politically in opposition to the social movements, in opposition to the election of Obama, reacting to the idea of a Black president, reacting to the possibility of a woman president in the 2016 election, heavily opposed to the racial justice struggles of 2020.

So Trump is able to reconstruct the Republican Party coalition by writing out sections of the neoconservative wing of the Party, based on what were widely seen as gross expenditure of billions of dollars in the military engagements in Southwest Asia, and to construct a coalition based on other sections that have been impacted by the 2008 crisis, and an always existing but growing reactionary base of predominantly white, middle class people.

I also want to say a little bit about the particular kind of far right characters in the millionaire and billionaire class who really provide the material basis of support for Trump. But if you look at his biggest supporters, you see that they mostly come from sections of the petty bourgeoisie. They're usually small business owners who have been hurt by the 2007-2008 crisis and who have embraced the politics of national chauvinism, racism and the bashing of immigrants, women, and trans folks.

People talk about the contemporary Republican Party as the party of the white working class, and I think that's wrong. Historically, when the pundits talk about the working class, what they're really talking about are self-identified white voters who are not college educated. This is not the way a Marxist would understand the definition of working class people as those who have to sell their labor power. This is the definition of people who are not college educated. Even by that much more restricted definition, the number of so-called white working class voters that Trump wins in 2020 is 59%, which is comparable to what Reagan won in 1980 and 1984. But if you actually look at the numbers depending on whether associate degrees count or not, you know, 41 to 47 percent of all white business owners in this country, as per the 2020 U.S. census, are without college degrees. So, when folks talk about the white working class in relation to support for Trump, what they're actually talking about is his huge base of support in the white petty bourgeoisie. This is the historic base of reaction, and not just in the United States.

DC: *And there's, of course, mass abstention, right? This also has to be considered whenever we talk about who votes in the U.S., while we've seen falling rates of participation in elections across the*

world, there has been a particularly sharp trend of this in the U.S..

AA: That's an incredibly important point. I don't have the statistics at hand, but the electoral system as a whole is incredibly alienating to people and the levels of participation in the U.S. are very small compared to those in other advanced capitalist countries.

So as important as the outcome is in some ways, the two-party electoral circus is really understood by a significant section of U.S. citizens as an expression of their lack of social power, implicitly or explicitly.

DC: *Before we move on to talk about Kamala Harris and the Democrats, are there any other last things you'd like to say about the Republicans in terms of the social forces that are organized under the Republican Party or their political program?*

AA: The [Project 2025 is not a joke](#), and people should go and look at what it represents.

I think there's something really insightful about Sam Farber's characterization of Trump as a [lumpen capitalist](#). Going back to his father, who was a renowned racist and was arrested at a Klan rally in Queens, New York in the 1920s or 1930s, Trump has historic ties to shady business practices and all kinds of criminality in the real estate world to sections of finance capital, which have supported that. Trump himself, politically, I think, is more of a unique opportunistic character.

But he's found a path to political power on the basis of the most reactionary political program. And so I do think it's worth talking about the threat to the immigrant community, the explicit appeals to racism, the threats to democratic rights, including abortion and trans rights, and the fact that the forces that back Trump include explicitly fascist organizations, street fighting forces that showed their faces during the January 6th uprising, but also include a coalition made up not only of the evangelical movement and a newly growing right-wing Catholic movement that includes J. D. Vance and important people in the Supreme Court with the most backwards ideas about women's rights and so-called family values.

So it's a coalition that includes all of the nastiest elements of U.S. society, some of which have really deep roots in U.S. history as a kind of settler-colonial enslaved project.

There's an incredible, understandable fear and anxiety, both about the moment overall—the state of the world, the state of society—and also the real threat represented by Trump and his movement. The Left cannot deny that. We have to understand, though, that our own failure to consolidate and advance an independent Left alternative is what allowed Trump to come to power.

DC: *Can you say something about how you analyze the Democrats, the social forces that are leading the Democratic Party, and the program around which they are united? And maybe also a little bit about who really controls that party and why efforts by people on the Left to take over the party or push it to the left have done so poorly.*

AA: Whether you're talking about the Democrats or Republicans, the party system in the U.S. is

unique because we're not talking about membership organizations. These are not parties that you can join and get a membership card and a right to select platforms and leaders. These are organizations that are very much controlled by their funders and then the constituent parts that rely on those funders. And in the neoliberal era in particular, there has been a massive expansion of funding into the electoral system by corporations and untraceable donors. The parties' structures are more intensely controlled by the base of funders than before.

There's a site called [Open Secrets](#) that tracks some of the funding for the various campaigns. What you see when you look at the Trump campaign is that Trump's backers are essentially groups of billionaires who have their own foundations, who often come out of domestic manufacturing, who have longstanding ties to far-right circles. And then you get sort of further down the line, energy interests and sections of finance capital. If you look at the Harris campaign, funders that can be traced include, much more prominently, sections of finance capital. And, as we can deduce from some of the PACs, sections of high tech and media capital. It's important to note that Kamala Harris comes out of the Bay Area and the Democratic Party machine there, and particularly in recent years has been very tied to Silicon Valley. So, while Trump has some very important individual backers like Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, among others, Harris has a lot of money coming in from Silicon Valley and from Hollywood. She's also getting important contributions from organized labor, tied in particular to the trades donating to two PACs in the tens of millions of dollars.

So, the coalition that they're trying to build electorally to vote for Harris is not necessarily consonant with the backers that essentially control the candidacy.

What's fascinating about this electoral cycle is how readily the Democratic Party was able to make Harris the nominee without any democratic process. She was essentially pronounced as the successor when Biden stepped down. That's a living example of how the Democratic Party functions. It's not a membership organization. There was no need for a vote. There wasn't even a need for a straw vote. The political leadership, in consultation with the financial backers, got together and decided what was going to be the best path for this campaign. And the Kamala Harris campaign was born.

DC: *Can you say something briefly about their program, what they're actually running on?*

AA: What's interesting is the evolution of the Democratic Party in the context of the post 2007-2008 crisis, the transformation of the Republican Party, and the exhaustion of the social movements, the foundering of the electoral efforts, the Left and the co-option of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020.

Parenthetically, there's a [really important article](#) by Haley Pessin that speaks to the way in which the Democratic Party was able to co-opt and neuter the 2020 movement. And there's a long history of this. But in the context of the Republican Party transformation, the exhaustion of social movements on the Left and their cooptation, the Democratic Party under Harris and Biden has really become the team of capitalist stability, of national security, of imperial stability, and that's manifest in all kinds of ways. If you think about this on the policy level, the adoption of frightening immigration policies in conjunction with some of the most right-wing leaders of the Republican Party in the Senate—the border bill—represents a frightening escalation of attacks on migrants.

The rallying around Harris by some of the most odious figures of neoconservatism, backers of imperial war and expansion, most prominently Dick Cheney, but not exclusively. There's a whole wing of what had previously been one of the bulwarks of the Republican coalition who are now backing Harris on this basis. The Democrats make gestures towards social issues. But if you scratch the surface, you find that, like with abortion—where there's understandable, extreme disgust and

anger and concern about the loss of abortion rights—the reality is that the Democratic Party was historically complicit in the loss of those rights. Joe Biden, for example, was an important vote to put Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court in the early nineties. So the Democratic Party has played a role in conceding on this issue over many decades. Even in the aftermath of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, there were things that the Democratic Party could have done to go on the offensive with regards to abortion issue. They've just failed to do so.

And so they shouldn't be seen as reliable allies, even on this issue. But really, at this moment, Harris has been unleashed, happy to throw around her bona fides as a gun carrying prosecutor who knows how to protect us from "the criminals" and "bad people." On a policy level, what we're seeing between these candidates is really a fight between the most reactionary far-right candidate in Trump, with the backing of actual fascist forces, and a candidate of the center and center right, standing for continuity and capital's stability in a context of growing instability and threats to empire. Ashley Smith's done some really important writings on this with regards to the Biden policy agenda, which we have no reason to doubt that Harris will continue. He's described it as [imperialist Keynesianism](#), a real effort to build a kind of manufacturing base in the U.S., to expand our national security apparatus and our defense capacity to compete with China and to maintain U.S. imperial hegemony in a new period of asymmetrical inter-imperial rivalries. This is not about a progressive agenda for the working class in any way. And so it's a very depressing moment. This context is important in thinking about how the Left should be approaching these elections.

There's an incredible, understandable fear and anxiety, both about the moment overall—the state of the world, the state of society—and also the real threat represented by Trump and his movement. The Left cannot deny that. We have to understand, though, that our own failure to consolidate and advance an independent Left alternative is what allowed Trump to come to power. We also have to recognize the fact that the Democratic Party, as the party of the establishment and the status quo, is a very easy target for the far-right in the absence of a Left. In the absence of any real alternative, there's a real appeal to that. However manifestly crazy and fucked up the criminal Donald Trump is, his campaign is tapping into a very real sense of dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party as a party of elites and the establishment in a context in which most people are suffering?

If the Left is not part of this equation, is not an alternative, or if we don't start to build one, then this dialectic is just going to get worse. And so, from the Tempest perspective, we're not interested in what individuals are going to do or in telling people what they should do in their minute at the ballot box. We understand people's anxieties.

But we are insisting that, if the Left is going to be able to build a new, different social pole, we have to rebuild independent institutions of the working class and within oppressed communities that are not so readily co-opted and dependent on the Democratic Party. If we want to build a Left that can act as a real opposition, we can't be spending our energies and efforts and resources on supporting the party of capitalist stability and imperialist expansion, including, in the context of Palestine, ongoing genocide.

DC: *I think that's a great place to end. Thanks very much, Aaron.*

AA: Thank you.

P.S.

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