

United States: Trump and his oligarchs (back) at the gate

Solidarity, political independence, and fighting the new authoritarianism

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On the brink of the second Trump presidency, Tempest offers this editorial statement on the current moment and the tasks ahead.

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This moment is an important wake-up call for the entire Left, including about our own weaknesses and those of our movements. Addressing these facts and arriving at the required strategic conclusions is necessary to confront the imminent attacks, scapegoating, and authoritarian efforts of the incoming Trump administration.

The Democrats were unable to defeat Trump because they have presided over economic conditions that have produced immiseration and precarity for the vast majority. Indeed, a Democratic president had been in the White House for twelve of the seventeen hard years since the start of the [long depression](#) in December 2007. The Biden administration failed to stop inflation from hammering working-class living standards. The meager reforms Joe Biden and Kamala Harris offered failed to meet the [needs](#) of a struggling population. Instead, they oversaw an austerity regime as popular pandemic [benefits expired](#). The Democrats also [made it a point](#) to spit in the face of the Palestine movement as they facilitate the genocide.

Harris ran [a right-wing, pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist campaign](#) designed to appeal to conservative suburban swing voters. She failed to win enough swing voters to replace millions of voters from the Democratic Party electoral base that she lost. She also [paid a price](#) for her party's unrelenting support for Zionist terror.

Trump won in part because, for many, he appeared to be the sole opposition to a bankrupt political establishment. However, he persuaded only about one-third of the electorate to give him their vote. His was a narrow win [without a popular mandate](#) for far-right governance. Trump's margin of victory did include [notable gains](#) among Latinos and Black men.

Yet, despite the [larger electorate](#) in 2024, Trump only increased his vote total by about three million votes while the Democrats lost close to *six million votes* [compared to 2020](#). Notably, [some estimates](#) place the total number of eligible voters who chose not to participate at 90 million people (greater than the vote totals for either candidate). These are not signs that the majority of people in the United States have been won over to a far-right program. These are signs of deep-seated

disillusionment with the status quo.

Trump won a close election, but he will govern as if he has a popular mandate. Republicans will possess all three branches of the federal government and will act quickly. [Trump vowed to act as a dictator on day one of his second administration.](#) Trump and the Republicans have a two-year window to implement their far-right program before the 2026 midterm elections, and they may take big risks in an all-out effort to do so.

What is going to happen in a second Trump term?

Trump and his Republican Party pose a more serious danger than during his first term in office. This time they have a plan—the authoritarian program [Project 2025](#)—and they are appointing a loyal cabinet to implement it. Their priorities are well-known: tax cuts for the rich, austerity for the rest; deregulation and attacks on parts of the administrative state; and weaponization of other parts of the state; new tariffs; mass deportations; war on trans people; repression of dissent, especially pro-Palestine activism; and transactional militarism.

Trump has [not established a stable alliance](#) of social forces capable of exercising leadership over society by winning mass consent to his vision of social order. Instead, he brings together a strange mixture of different elements, including rogue billionaires—a minority of the capitalist class—concentrated in tech and cryptocurrency, large parts of the middle class, and a minority of the multiracial working class. Each of these elements has been drawn into Trump's tenuous coalition for different reasons, and their material interests are in tension. Working-class Trump supporters frustrated over the state of the economy are blaming immigrants. Small business owners who support Trump are angry about the impact of pandemic lockdowns and other regulations. Finally, Trump's [lumpen capitalist](#) base sees the potential for a state that hides their crimes and ignores their transgressions.

The experience of Trump in office will undermine the support he has built as a candidate opposed to an unpopular incumbent. His program does not propose real solutions to the problems frustrating many of the voters who lent him their support. Tariffs and deportations will not fight inflation—on the contrary, [they will exacerbate it.](#) [A likely increase in military conflict](#) undermines Trump's promises to stop spending public money on “foreign entanglements.”

The much belated announcement of the Gaza cease-fire, on the eve of Trump's inauguration, demonstrates just how little urgency the Biden administration gave to the end of the genocide over the last fifteen months. But it should not sow any illusions about Trump's pending role as the leader of U.S. empire or his willingness to challenge the mass murderers of the Netanyahu administration. To say the least, any “solutions” offered by the Trump administration will not be concerned with regional peace or democracy, let alone Palestinian liberation, and are likely to make the dynamics worse.

The second Trump term will not be defined by stability. Nor will support for the far right necessarily grow. Rather, his administration will be governing in increasingly difficult, dangerous and volatile circumstances. Whatever position of power Trump operates from, his decisions and policies in office will be incapable of resolving the underlying rot in U.S. society and the global capitalist system. They will only produce further discontent.

Across the globe, hatred and anger at ruling classes and their parties have produced unexpected volatility and episodic revolt. [South Korea](#), [Georgia](#), and [Syria](#) are the most recent examples of this. The United States is part of this global dynamic. We should expect conflict and episodic resistance

here as well. However daunting, the Left must get its act together to build a broad and enduring opposition.

Unlike 2016, when shock and outrage at Trump's first victory had mass expression and direction, there is, among liberal forces today, a widespread [demobilization](#) and disorientation. Of course, this does not mean that there will not be resistance, just that the terrain on which we fight will be quite different. Just as when the [Dobbs decision](#) came down in 2022, the Democrats are showing no sign that they will wage a fight. Instead, the party is continuing to strengthen its commitment to legalistic defenses that are unlikely to succeed in courts packed with right-wing judges.

We have lessons to learn

At least in part, the different political terrain in 2016 and 2024 reflect choices made by the socialist Left over those years. [Arguments for supporting](#) a rightward-moving Democratic Party were common on the socialist Left since 2016 and certainly this year. Many argued that preventing the rise of fascism required supporting the election of Democrats as if doing so would allow the Left to live and fight another day.

What outcome did this strategy produce? On the precipice of Trump's inauguration, it seems to have produced disorientation and further disillusionment and fear.

The Left must absorb certain lessons about how we got here. When socialist politics and social movements are dissolved into the Democratic Party, they lose the capacity to develop into a self-reliant power. The resistance to Trump and the far right cannot bow to the leadership of the Democratic Party, or it will lead us in a circle right back to where we came from. A prime example is the [trajectory from the George Floyd Uprising](#) in 2020 to [Kamala Harris' pro-cop campaign](#) in 2024. NGO forces organized how many protests during the first Trump term, only to circulate calls to vote for Democrats in the next election? Instead, we need membership organizations and ongoing campaigns that people can join and demands that they can fight for. We need independent strategies developed by ordinary people organizing alongside each other, not top-down, staff-driven models that use protests as photo-ops on a campaign trail.

With the benefit of the experience of these last eight years, we should understand the importance of committing ourselves to broad unity in action to wage defensive struggles. We know who has been targeted by the far right: the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, unions, the Palestine movement and the Left as a whole. We need to organize to defend ourselves and fight the right. This work won't be done on our behalf by government figures or by union and NGO officials. No one is coming to save us.

This general orientation is based on solidarity: The idea that an injury to one is an injury to all must guide us. It is the only way we can forge the power to resist Trump's attempts to divide and conquer. It will be a strategic disaster, not to mention an abdication of our commitments as socialists if we were to abandon a principled defense of democratic rights. We must be seen to lead in defending trans people, migrants, or any other group of oppressed people. Giving this up for the sake of building shallow, [supposedly "universal" unity](#) on "bread-and-butter" issues or, worse, in the name of ["anti-woke" ideology](#), will destroy the ability of the Left to counter the far-right where it is taking root.

The Palestine solidarity movement is of special strategic importance. It is facing the leading edge of attacks against the right to organize and [the right to speak out](#) against a racist, genocidal state. These attacks are being used to dampen the resolve of anyone who wants to take a stand at their

workplace, on their campus, or in their neighborhood. Israel also remains of particular significance to the ability of U.S imperialism to control southwest Asia and its oil reserves. Palestine and resistance throughout the region, like the uprising in Syria that toppled Assad, are key to the opposition to Trump.

For struggle and breaking out of the two-party stranglehold

There should be no question that Trump and the Republicans will overreach in some ways, defeating themselves by seeking to do or gain too much. This will inevitably produce splits within the capitalist establishment. New social movements may emerge from those ruptures. Whatever our challenges, these movements will contain opportunities for forging a resistance that refuses to be lured back into the Democratic Party ranks in 2026 and in 2028.

Nowhere in the world has the strategy of electoralism—treating elections as the primary way to change society—even mitigated, let alone solved, the problems of the 21st century's unfolding catastrophes. In fact, it has strengthened the hand of the far right everywhere.

Transformative change will require us to build resilient, democratic, and politically independent organizations out of the movements to come. After all, it was mass protests and mass strikes that won major reforms in the 1930s and 1960s, the two periods of the largest advances for the working class and oppressed. This is not an argument against engaging in electoral politics; rather, it is one that takes seriously the road that we must travel if we are going to get where we need to go. First and foremost, we need a strategy that fully breaks the Democratic Party's stranglehold on the Left. Senator Bernie Sanders and the Squad in Congress have not achieved this. At best, they are isolated as a loyal opposition inside a hostile party. At worst, they are collaborators willing to attack our movements in order to get the positions they think are going to give them leverage. (Look no further than [the vote](#) on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman.)

Rather than playing a rigged game of high politics, the Left urgently needs to set a course towards building a party of our own. We need an organization that can challenge the two parties of capital not only at the ballot box but also in the streets, on campuses, and most importantly, at the workplace. The Left needs a strategic approach to elections. In some cases, we should participate and run our own candidates especially in one party strongholds—most of the U.S.—and on our own ballot line. However, we should do so with no illusions that politicians can deliver reforms from office without mass disruptive struggle from below. Those candidates must be accountable to our party, social movements, and unions, not free agents undisciplined by the people who elected them. Furthermore, this would have to be a very different kind of party, one primarily focused on action where ordinary people have power—not the halls of government, but in neighborhoods, on campuses, and in workplaces. These are where we can organize our social strength—our class power—to shake things up and shut things down through mass strikes and protests.

The Left should be actively discussing the paths to and parameters for such a party, but we know that it cannot simply be proclaimed into existence. The small organizations of the Left that field candidates can be commended for offering an opportunity for a protest vote, but these are not real parties. None of them organizes with a genuine base of militants in the working class and among the oppressed. No such party exists at the current time in the United States.

The politics of a future Left party cannot be negotiated in advance but rather must be forged out of common struggle. The only way to get there is through a process of organizing and activity. The new resistance we are required to build under Trump can be an important avenue towards that goal, but

it requires socialists to help chart the way forward through the experience of struggle.

The Left must refuse to acquiesce to the two-party electoral options that are currently on offer, but we also cannot pretend that there is a shortcut through the process that has to take place. There will be no significant break with the Democrats when working people and the oppressed feel disempowered and without an alternative path forward. It is the experience of struggle—demands, victories, losses, votes, challenges, opportunities, wars and all—that will transform people's expectations and activity that then makes the possibility for new organizations to take root. It is this process and that experience and vision that socialists should have in mind as we prepare for the second Trump term.

Necessary struggles bring opportunities

Neither Tempest nor any other Left current can by itself fill the void of what needs to be built. However, we must be collectively building open democratic entry points for people to join the struggles as they continue to unfold. Much of this work will be dependent on local conditions and local forces, but this approach should drive all of our work. Our political horizons will inevitably have to transcend the local conditions given how much is being determined by national, and even international, dynamics. This will be an essential part of building an infrastructure of dissent that can unlock the possibility of greater organizational unity. Supporting, and where needed creating, independent organizations of struggle will be key.

The second Trump administration has promised shock and awe as it begins its hateful rampage. In so doing, it will seek to project an inevitability and omnipotence that it does not (yet) have. While the authoritarian right hopes to disarm any resistance and to continue rallying capital to its banner we should not allow a sense of despair and disillusionment to do this work for them. We have no choice but to fight the new authoritarianism. In so doing we can and must develop a stronger Left strategy to hone the resistance into a more effective force—one that shows a way out of the impasse we have been stuck in for too long. And in so doing we can demonstrate that there is still power in our collective capacity to struggle for a world based on solidarity and an actual alternative to the rule and coercion of these odious oligarchs and capital as a whole.

Tempest

P.S.

- Tempest. January 17, 2025 :
<https://tempestmag.org/2025/01/trump-and-his-oligarchs-back-at-the-gate/>