

Optimism...Pessimism...?

Hello,

At least in the circles I am a part of, everyone is very depressed and pessimistic, mostly expecting defeats. (Everyone is in their 30s, still active in some form) Protests are expected, but nothing on a scale or militancy to stop Trump's policies. Here are some very brief points for why people see it this way.

1. The conditions which made revolution possible in the 20th century do not exist.
2. People are more dominated by liberalism or conservative than ever before.
3. The complete collapse of solidarity.
4. Symbolic protests, which are 99% of what we do, are pointless.
5. There are no real efforts to stop deportations, mass incarceration etc For example where is the movement for black lives matter. PART of the reason can be explained that for 5 years there have been protests and there has been zero progress made.
6. The mass struggles are really shock troops for the neo liberal order of the Obama, Clinton types. No sign of escaping that.

There is an expectation that war is on the cards. No one seriously believes that a coup or fascism is likely. But it seems that the Trump admin is really praying for a large terrorist attack on US soil. (Everyone is trying to make sense of Trump's make believe terrorist attacks happening every week or so.) This will be the pretext for a war. This will unify the country on the terms Trump is the strongest and liberals weakest, not to mention most of the population.

I thought this article captured things pretty well. It is worth noting that whether progressive or right wing populist the similarities in ideology and struggle are very similar.

<http://brooklynrail.org/2017/02/field-notes/Elephant-Blues>

I know people on this list have a very different expectation of the future. I have not been convinced by the analysis so far. Hoping maybe something new will be said and provide a slightly more optimistic way forward.

Shemon

Shemon,

1. If you and your friends are thinking about revolution, I think you are right to be depressed; I don't see a revolution on the horizon either now or any time in the foreseeable future.

2. On the other hand, I think there are reasons for at least guarded optimism vis a vis the existing anti-Trump resistance. I think it has momentum and is likely to last, at least for a while. When people see what the Republicans have in store to amend or replace the ACA, I believe even more people will get angry, and at least some of them will get active. I also believe that the Trump-Russia issue has legs and that this will continue to embarrass and addle Trump and his allies. Recently, right-wing congressman Darrell Issa, a Trump supporter, came out in favor of an independent prosecutor to lead the investigation and for attorney general Jeff Sessions to recuse himself. Also, the ruling elite is not united behind Trump. Quite the contrary, many sectors are opposed to significant facets of his program, e.g., immigration, import taxes, tearing up trade deals, attack on transgender rights, etc.

3. I do not see a "complete collapse of solidarity," unless you mean by that working class solidarity, strictly speaking; yes, too many white workers voted for and still support Trump. In contrast, I see a significant and heartening outpouring of basic human solidarity across religious, racial/ethnic, gender, and issue lines: e.g., Jews uniting with Muslims and vice versa, demonstrations of solidarity on airlines, sympathy for undocumented people/opposition to deportations, support for transgender rights, etc.

4. I have two concerns vis a vis the current anti-Trump resistance: (a) it may run out of gas at some point if there is no progress or no significant change in the balance of forces; (b) the movement remains liberal in sentiment and ripe for the Democratic Party to lead.

5. I am also concerned about the weakness and isolation of the libertarian (and anti-Democratic Party) forces on the left and the fact that most left groups and individuals will be panicked into supporting the Democratic Party next year and in 2020.

All this said, I think it is too early to be completely demoralized and disheartened, unless of course you were hoping for a revolution in the near future.

Ron

Shemon,

Thanks for sharing your thoughts on the challenges and obstacles of the current period. I share some of your pessimism in some of the areas you discuss, but also have greater optimism regarding others.

Here are a few of my thoughts and observations:

1. Regarding movements of the past decade (Black Lives Matter, Occupy, Standing Rock and the environmental movement more broadly): While these movements have shown and experienced the limits you discuss, they have not been without value or accomplishments. *Occupy* awakened/reawakened people to the value and vibrancy of militant action that shows little respect for 'politeness' or so-called 'decency.' Although it couldn't sustain itself, it created a significant (and, I think, lasting) shift in consciousness regarding wealth inequality in the U.S., and the role and agenda of corporate America. *BLM* has, of course, highlighted the war that goes on, day in and day out, against the Black community, particularly the young, male Black community, by the police and the forces of 'justice.' Hopefully, that movement has not lost its voice.

2. The prospects today for the development of a radical, militant, mass movement seem to me to be far greater than at any time since the mid-60s/early 70s (and may even be more promising):

--Wide sections of the population feel under attack from the current administration around a wide range of issues.

--The willingness to act in response to these attacks has been remarkably strong, from the Inauguration Day protests, to the

travel ban protests, to the town halls, to the now-developing "no wall/no ban' protests. The rapidity of response, the numbers, and the intensity all suggest that something very new is afoot. (I suspect that the more attenuated movements of the past decade helped pave the way for this deeper manifestation.) You are right to point out that, on their own terms, these protests do not (yet) challenge power in a significant way. How they will develop in the months/years ahead will depend on a host of factors, many of them unknown.

--The growing movement seems to almost instinctively recognize the need to link issues; protest after protest couples immigration issues to the rights of minorities, women and LGBT people, to worker rights, to climate change to social and economic justice more broadly.

--The movements of the 60s, while broad and sustained enough to give the decade its name, were nonetheless minority movements. (Nixon wasn't wrong, no matter how cynically he used it, to refer to his 'silent majority.')

The developing movement today seems to have the potential to be 'majoritarian;' vast segments of the population feel under attack. (While there is room for slicing and dicing the numbers, I am not convinced that Trump's base is even 25% of the population.)

--In the 60s, the movements became radical (i.e., significant elements moved *outside and against* the Democratic Party for a period of time) because the DP was wedded to the Cold War generally and the Vietnam War specifically. It also had maintained an alliance with the segregationist southern Democrats for more than three decades. It is not clear how adaptable the current Democratic Party will prove to be, but, for now, as the party of the Clintons, it appears to many, many people to be part of the problem, not part the solution. We will see where this goes.

--Lastly, in a period of ferment such as the one we appear to be entering, events present themselves in their fullness at rapid speed, lessons are learned quickly, and qualitative leaps in consciousness and orientation can occur in ways that do not seem possible in 'normal' times.

That said, I agree with you on three points, though with some

caveats:

1) The Democratic Party (liberalism more broadly) is a substantial threat. The material basis for cooptation in the USA is enormous. Whether a movement will develop that recognizes that the DP is but one pillar of the same status quo that brought things to where they are (and can bring even worse) remains to be seen.

2) Trump is a substantial threat. Right now, he is the catalyst for the developing movement. Yet, real people are under real attack. Whether he is 'hoping' for a terrorist attack or not, you are right that he would use such an attack to rally support around him, and to significantly increase repression and his authoritarian presidency. That said, such a development (or others that parallel it) could spell the end of a movement *or* further deepen and radicalize it. Again, this depends on factors that cannot be predicted.

3). I, too, am pessimistic, about the prospects for revolution. We seem to be miles and miles away from a consciousness that has a vision and burning desire for an alternative economic/social/political system, recognizes the worldwide brutality and injustice of capitalism, and sees cooperation from the bottom up as viable and necessary. Periods of intense struggle can be transformative; whether this is such a period, and whether the struggles of this period will be that transformative, remains to be seen. I am not optimistic on that score.

But, what alternative is there?

In solidarity,

Rod
